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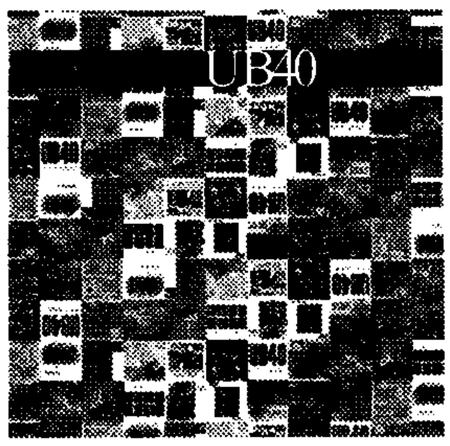

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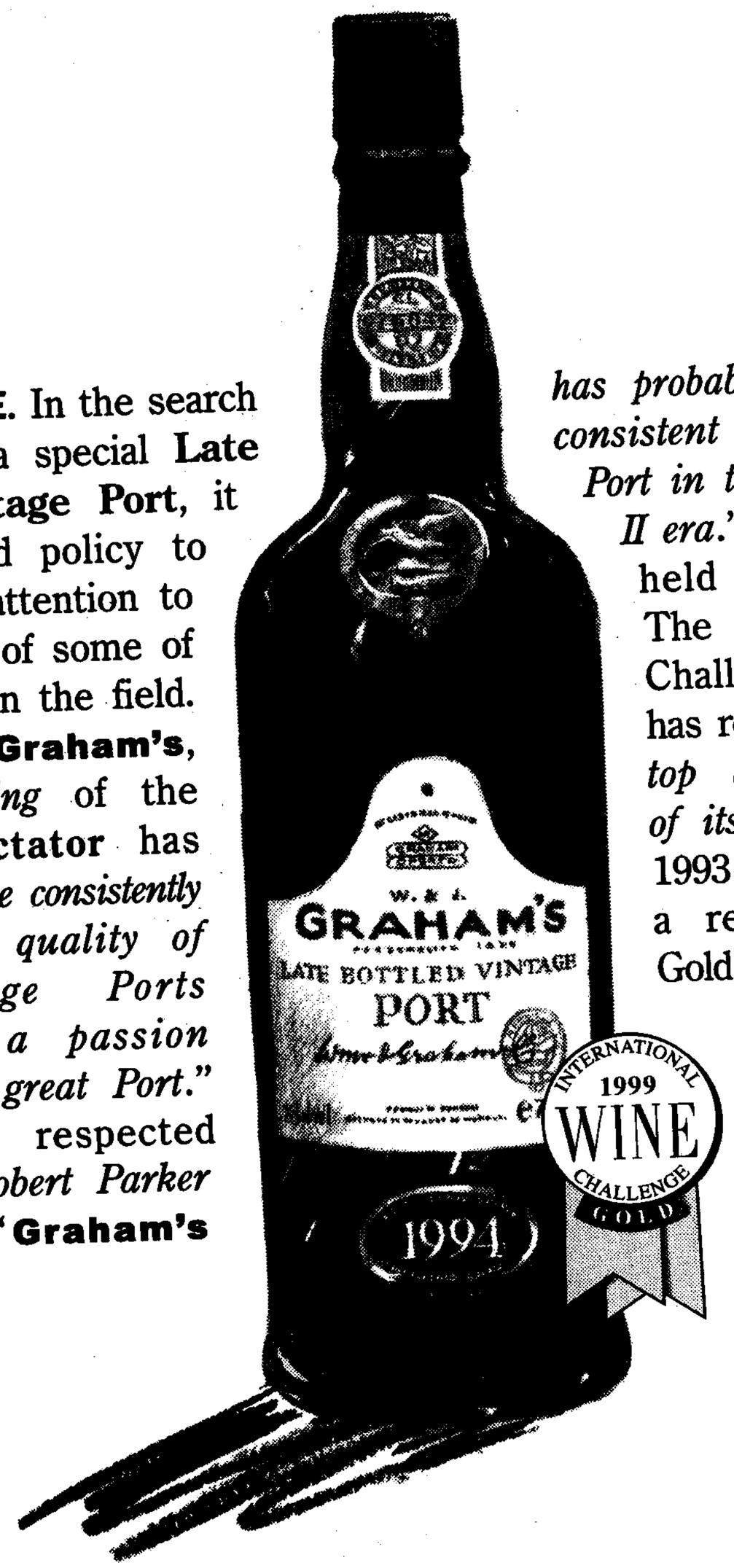

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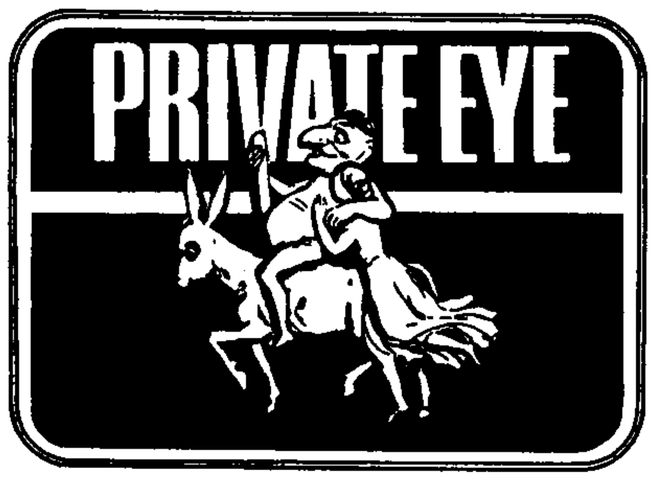
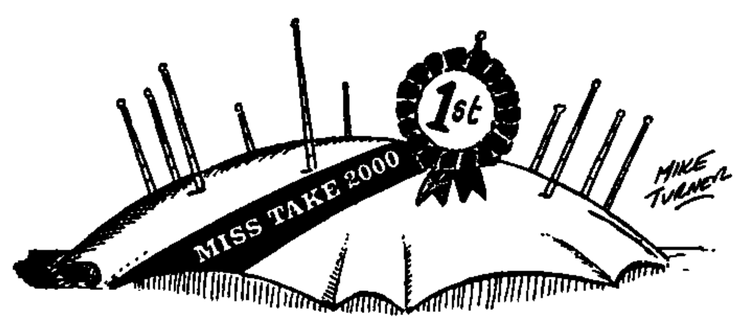




Competition Venue

WHATEVER Railtrack says publicly about putting safety before profits, its choice of Steven Marshall as its new chief executive speaks volumes about its priorities.

Even though the business has been plunged into crisis by deficient civil engineering and over-emphasis on accounting, Railtrack has chosen... another accountant.

Marshall doesn't know how a railway works. He moved to Railtrack last December from Thorn plc, which he had joined from Grand Metropolitan (where Gerald Corbett was once finance director). Marshall, like Corbett, certainly knows how *money* works, however. He was formerly Railtrack's finance director and is a fellow of the chartered institute of management accountants.

Railtrack's board did not offer an inspiring choice of alternatives, mainly because engineers who were prepared to stand up to the money men were weeded out long ago. But several directors remain who do have experience of railways or engineering — or both. Rod Muttram, safety and standards director, belongs to the institution of railway signal engineers. Richard Middleton, commercial director until last week and now technical director, is a member of the institution of civil engineers. He, alas, was out of contention because he has worked for Britain's railways for 24 years.

MANY of the emergency speed restrictions imposed on the railways since Hatfield are probably unnecessary — but they were imposed because Railtrack couldn't be certain track was safe.

Railtrack's outgoing chief executive Gerald Corbett's policy of trusting contractors with as much as possible (*Eye* 1014) involved using external firms to monitor and record the state of the infrastructure. When the balloon went up after Hatfield, Railtrack had no central archive of records. The only rapid response it could make was to wrench the plug from the socket instead of managing the problem properly.

Restrictions are dragging on because records haven't been maintained thoroughly and each piece of suspect line has to be inspected afresh and repaired if necessary. This takes engineers away from the track repairs they were scheduled to carry out — where the speed restrictions may be prolonged or new ones imposed. Before each speed restriction is lifted, somebody has to sign it off. Responsibility is so fudged it's not always clear who (Railtrack managers or one of a number of contractors) must put their head on the block and declare a line safe for high speeds.

WILL Steve Norris be the next chairman of Railtrack? "Stranger things have happened," the old rogue told David Frost last Sunday. "You never know."

Whether Norris is quite the chap to restore public confidence is another question. Just over a year ago, after the Paddington disaster, he wrote a post-mortem in the London *Evening Standard*, scolding critics who portrayed the crash as a failure of privatised railways.

But then, as befits a former second-hand car dealer, director-general of the Road Haulage Association and director of private bus companies, Steve has never been much of a railway buff. In 1995, as minister of transport, he explained why he preferred cars to trains: "You have your own company, your own temperature control, your own music and don't have to put up with dreadful human beings sitting alongside you."

Even now Norris himself travels everywhere in his limo – presumably to avoid those dreadful rail-commuters for whom he may soon be responsible.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The current dog's dinner of temporary speed limits, often instituted at short notice, may confuse drivers and actually increase the number of trains passing red lights."

— *Private Eye 1014,* 3 November 2000

"[Railtrack] is looking into allegations that the speed restrictions are distracting drivers to such an extent they are more likely to go through red lights."

— *BBC Radio 4's World Tonight,* 24 November 2000

LAST autumn the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), a body set up in April 1999 to advise on best practice in the NHS, recommended that health professionals should not prescribe the flu-drug Relenza, an extraordinarily expensive medicine manufactured by Glaxo Wellcome.

Then in April this year business-friendly health minister Alan Milburn set up a task force on competitiveness in the pharmaceutical industry, made up of government ministers and drugs firm bosses, including Sir Richard Sykes of Glaxo Wellcome.

There is surely no connection between Sykes's appointment and the complete U-turn enacted by NICE, which announced on 21 November that it now recommends GPs should prescribe Relenza after all?

Meanwhile at the ministry of agriculture Nick Brown is preparing to add a new variety of genetically modified maize, Chardon LL, to the national seed list. This means that farmers in the UK will be able to buy and grow the crop without giving any notification. The agriculture minister, who gave Chardon LL the go-ahead earlier this year, must first sit through two hearings on arguments for and against the GM forage maize, but he is under no obligation to take the advice proffered.

Brown's enthusiasm for Chardon LL is obviously completely unrelated to the friendly relations between "new" Labour and the crop's manufacturer, Aventis, which sponsored a speech on "modernising the NHS" made by Alan Milburn at this year's party conference.

AS THE prosecution of David Shayler for revealing the truth about the illegal activities of the intelligence services looms, legal minds turn back to the last great official secrets prosecution: the famous ABC case in 1977 in which Crispin Aubrey (A), John Berry (B) and Duncan Campbell (C) were prosecuted for revealing intelligence secrets gleaned from Cyprus.

The three were acquitted after a heroic campaign and defence. Of special note in both was the unofficial political adviser to Campbell, a young Labour MP called Robin Cook. Cook became so involved in the campaign for the three prisoners he even asked a challenging parliamentary question about the case.

Mr Cook is now foreign secretary and responsible for MI6 and GCHQ. He is constantly denouncing Shayler and is a strong supporter of his prosecution...

"Now that's all over we'd better start campaigning for the next election"

Street of Shame

SEXTRA! SEXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT TIT!

RICHARD DESMOND may be a newcomer to Fleet Street, but he's no stranger to the *Express*. In the early 1990s ads for his magazines such as *Black and Blue* ("packed full of bra-bustin' black babes") and *Asian Babes* ("Eastern cuties show the lot!") were regularly to be found in all the *Express* titles. The reason for this shameless promotion of smut was simple: the papers' then boss, Lord Stevens of Ludgate, had signed a deal under which United Newspapers distributed the full range of Desmond's top-shelf mags.

Alas, Stevens and Desmond then fell out, and m'learned friends were brought in to separate the warring parties.

Shortly afterwards, in November 1994, the *Daily Express* ran a huge "investigative" series over three successive days focusing on "seedy empires built from dirty money" and exposing "the barons making huge profits from sleaze". Desmond, who was described as the "market leader", came in for particularly close scrutiny. Although he lived in a North London mansion and had rubbed shoulders with the Duke of Edinburgh, readers were warned that "just under the veneer of respectability is a story of women being exploited and degraded".

Wisely the *Express* omitted to mention that it had itself advertised and distributed his disgusting publications. Frothing outrage was now the order of the day: Desmond had "explored almost every niche in the porn market. He publishes fat women without their clothes in *Big and Fat*, older women without their clothes in *Forty Plus*, and women dressed in rubber and PVC in *Eros*". Worse still, his mags contained "ads for graphic telephone sex and brutal, hard-core videos which are far from glamorous".

Now, a mere six years later, Desmond owns the newspaper which denounced him so thunderously. No doubt his lieutenants are even now combing the building to see if any of the hacks responsible for the 1994 *exposé* are still on the payroll.

VETERAN *Express* employees gulped in disbelief when they noticed the thuggish-looking figures of their former colleagues Ian Monk and Stan Myerson accompanying Richard Desmond into the office on the day he bought the paper.

Monk is now Desmond's PR man, while Myerson is managing director of Desmond's company Northern & Shell. A press release issued by Monk later that afternoon pointed out that Myerson, who would now take charge of ad sales at the *Express*, was himself a former deputy advertising director of Express Newspapers.

What he neglected to add was that Myerson was sacked from the *Express* on 1 September 1994 for "gross misconduct". It transpired that Myerson had been bugging the office of his boss, Mike Moore, and making baseless allegations against him. Myerson also had a fearsome reputation for threatening – and sometimes using – violence against underlings who incurred his displeasure. Just the chap to raise morale among the wretched staff at the *Express*, eh?

As is Ian Monk, who will now be effectively in charge of the editorial side. As deputy editor of the paper in the mid-1990s he too was known for his "take no prisoners" managerial style. Alas, he too had to leave his job rather abruptly. In November 1996 he acquired a pilfered typescript of Allan Starkie's book *Fergie – Her Secret Life*, which was due to be serialised in the *Mail*. Shortly afterwards his wife, Anita Monk, tried to sell it to the *Sun* for £4,000 – only to find herself arrested for theft and handling stolen goods. Monk departed the *Express* soon afterwards, escorted from the building by security guards from Group 4.

And that was the end of Monk and Myerson at the *Express* – or so their relieved colleagues thought. One can only hope that the dreaded duo are not in a vindictive mood.

DESPITE their misgivings about being bought by a porn-merchant, hacks at the *Express* were at least glad to hear that Richard Desmond had promised lavish investment in the paper – a welcome change from the tight-fisted regime of milord Hollick. "I will spend whatever it takes," the new owner announced.

But where will the money come from? Earlier this year Desmond's cheerleaders at the *Sunday Times*'s business section ran several pieces hyping up the success of his company Northern & Shell. "His accountants are currently putting the finishing touches to his 1999 accounts," City editor John Jay reported in February, "and these are expected to show a profit of £11m... For this year the company is confident its profits will hit £20m."

When the accounts were eventually filed, however, they told a rather different story: the Northern & Shell Group, which covers all Desmond's non-pornographic ventures (including *OK!*) made just £1.8m profit.

The latest figures from Portland Investments Ltd, which runs the "adult" half of his empire, are equally unspectacular. Desmond's stable of porn-mags such as *Asian Babes*, *Nude Wives* and *Big Ones* actually made a loss of £870,000 last year (as against a profit of £224,000 in 1998). The only redeeming feature was the profit of £2.57m on Desmond's satellite-porn operation, the Fantasy Channel, which gave Portland Investments a net profit of £1.7m for 1999.

These are hardly the sort of sums required to rescue the *Express* newspapers. Desmond has already had to take out a large loan from Commerzbank to pay the purchase price of £125m, and he'll be wary of borrowing much more. *Express* hacks who were looking forward to lavish promotional campaigns and bigger editorial budgets may find their rejoicing is a bit premature. They should forget the trebles all round: not least because Desmond, like Lord "Alco" Hollick, hates hacks who drink.

EXPRESS DERAILS WITH 400 ABOARD

The Mirror

DESPITE stiff [*sic*] competition, the *Telegraph* has devoted more space than any other paper to the "top-shelf" titles of new *Express* owner Richard Desmond, lamenting the fact that "the voice of respectable middle England" has been taken over by the man responsible for *Horny Housewives*, *Private Lust* and *Asian Babes*.

But consider the following: "Awesome Angela Basu just loves to flash her dusky dumplings. The Yorkshire lass, who is just 19, said: 'My philosophy is that if you've got it, you flaunt it. And I certainly think I've got it!'" Thus a winner in the Asian Babe of the Week feature – which appears, not in one of Desmond's mags but in the *Daily* and *Sunday Sport* (prop. David Sullivan, another porn-king turned press-baron). And the future of those particular babes lies not with Desmond but with the *Telegraph*'s proprietor, Conrad Black, himself.

The *Sport* titles – now sadly depleted of alien stories and instead full of ads for internet porn sites run by Sullivan and the Gold brothers – are printed by West Ferry Printers Ltd of London E14. West Ferry is currently owned 50-50 by the *Express* and *Telegraph* groups. But thanks to a cleverly worded pre-emption contract and the *Express*'s change of owner, the *Torygraph* can now take full control.

So Black will get to keep all the cash generated by printing photos of Ms Basu and her many pals, while the *Telegraph* continues to harrumph sternly about tie-ups between respectable newspapers and porn-magnates.

SOHO-based VNU Business Publications recently disposed of the services of an employee who had been downloading large quantities of porn on to his office computer.

Surely VNU Soho is no relation of the VNU empire in Holland which, among other magazines, publishes the Dutch version of *Playboy*, also available online?

TWO weeks have passed since the leak of Piers Morgan's "smoking email" about his share dealings in Viglen. Yet the *Mirror* has still been unable to find the space to update readers on the editor's financial acumen.

The obvious place for such a report would be the "Suzy in the City" column, successor to the City Slickers, which takes up at least a full page every Tuesday to Saturday and is edited by former *Telegraph* City correspondent Suzy Jagger. Suzy certainly has excellent sources: it was while at the *Telegraph* back in February that she first revealed Piers' share-trading antics. Moron's admirers (*Who they? – Ed.*) viewed his subsequent enticing of Suzy to the *Mirror* as further proof of his lovable chutzpah. But others thought it a bit odd that Jagger should accept a job from someone whom she'd exposed in such uncomplimentary terms.

Since arriving at the *Mirror*, and despite having broken the original story, Suzy has remained silent about Moron's cash bonanza. Like Old Man River, she don't say nuthin' – but surely she must know somethin'?

IT COMES as little surprise that the latest edition of the BBC's new celebrity magazine *Star* features David Beckham, yet another client of its pisspoor PR agency Outside, on the front cover.

The first issue of the *Hello*-lite mag included lengthy interviews with two other Outside clients, Boydrone's Ronan Keating and Stephen Gately (see *Eye* 1015). The genius behind Outside is Alan Edwards, a man who regards Piers Morgan as the greatest living newspaper editor to the extent of pasting a pic of Moron embracing him on his personal web site.

Music hacks believe that when Moron is finally forced out of Canary Wharf he will quickly relocate to Outside, where he will perform much the same role as he does at present – filling page after page with phoney showbiz stories.

FOLLOWING our Hackwatch on Mark Steyn, Canadian readers have pointed out that we omitted the great sage's *pièce de résistance*: an article which appeared in Conrad Black's *National Post* in Canada a week before the US election.

Steyn offered a helpful glossary to help readers translate what the dastardly liberal American media would be saying about the result. Some pundits, for example, would try to maintain that it was a cliffhanger. "In most English-speaking cultures," he sneered, "a 'cliffhanger' means a contest whose outcome is in doubt until the very end. But in the United States it means a contest where one fellow is hanging off the cliff flailing wildly while the other's up on top leisurely playing the 18th hole before heading to the clubhouse for a celebratory drink."

Steyn's piece ended with this immortal prediction: "Next Tuesday, 7pm EST. Dan Rather, CBS evening news: 'According to our exclusive CBS exit poll this remains the tightest presidential election night in 40 years.' Translation: Bush landslide. Get the cookies and milk and have an early night."

EVEN by the eccentric standards of the news-free *Sunday Times*, last weekend's big political scoop was pretty odd. The paper had obtained a few pages of jottings scribbled by the Rev Blair's right-hand man Jonathan Powell – but admitted that they weren't particularly interesting.

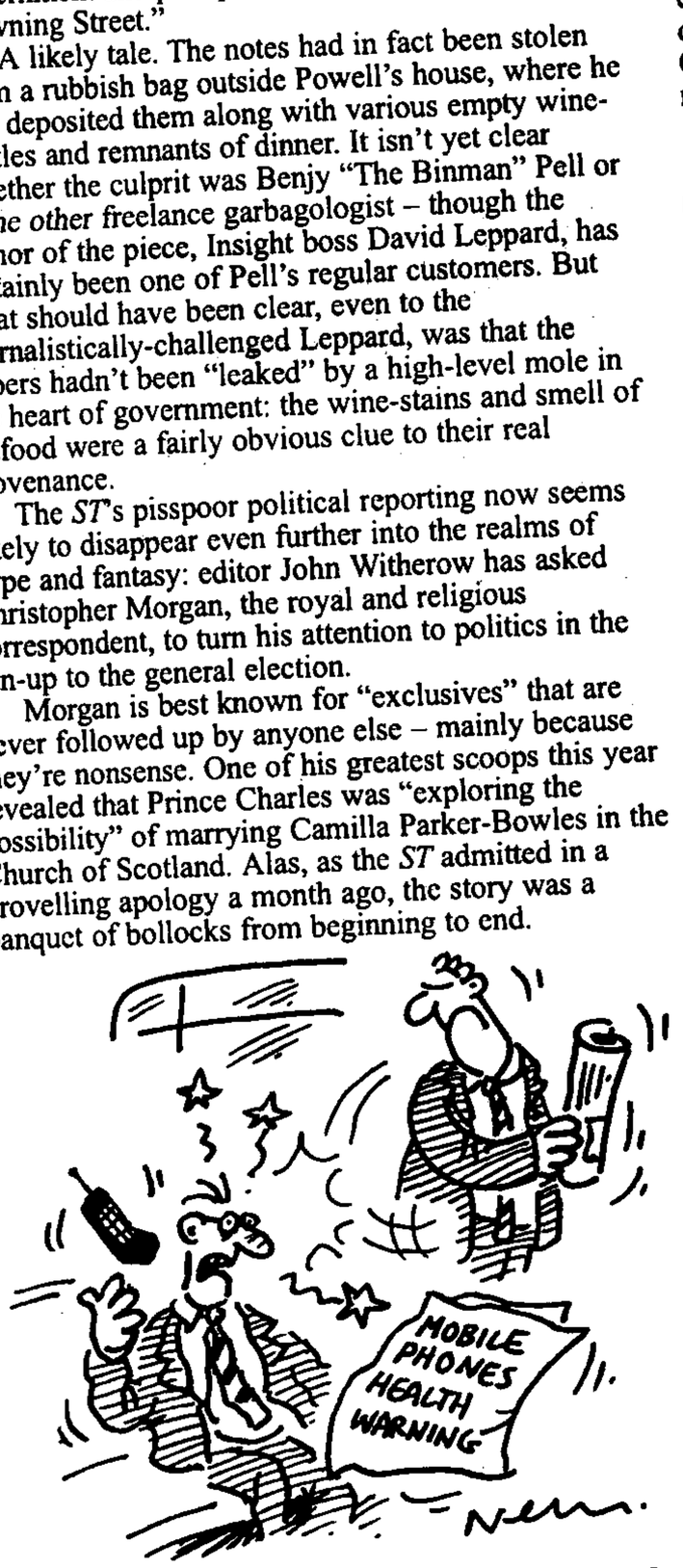
A typical entry read: "Clinton – future, ME, NI, pol", thus confirming that Powell was reminding himself to chat to the PM about the American president, the Middle East and Northern Ireland. Shock! Horror!

Why bung this non-story at the top of the front page? Allow the *ST* to explain: "Powell is one of Blair's closest advisers. The leaking of his personal notes will raise suspicions of a mole in the heart of government and precipitate an inquiry into security at Downing Street."

A likely tale. The notes had in fact been stolen from a rubbish bag outside Powell's house, where he had deposited them along with various empty wine-bottles and remnants of dinner. It isn't yet clear whether the culprit was Benjy "The Binman" Pell or some other freelance garbagologist – though the author of the piece, Insight boss David Leppard, has certainly been one of Pell's regular customers. But what should have been clear, even to the journalistically-challenged Leppard, was that the papers hadn't been "leaked" by a high-level mole in the heart of government: the wine-stains and smell of catfood were a fairly obvious clue to their real provenance.

The *ST*'s pisspoor political reporting now seems likely to disappear even further into the realms of hype and fantasy: editor John Witherow has asked Christopher Morgan, the royal and religious correspondent, to turn his attention to politics in the run-up to the general election.

Morgan is best known for "exclusives" that are never followed up by anyone else – mainly because they're nonsense. One of his greatest scoops this year revealed that Prince Charles was "exploring the possibility" of marrying Camilla Parker-Bowles in the Church of Scotland. Alas, as the *ST* admitted in a grovelling apology a month ago, the story was a banquet of bollocks from beginning to end.



IT seems the former Tory MP for Torbay and intelligence expert Rupert Allason has got himself involved in a libel action again.

This time, however, the action is not of the choosing of the litigious Allason. It seems that he sounded off about what he says is the close relationship between David Shayler and Roger Windsor, the source for the *Mirror*'s long campaign against Arthur Scargill.

Windsor contacted Shayler to confirm that the two men have never met or spoken to each other. Hence the libel action, Windsor v Allason. Intriguing.

Grauniad crossword solution

TOP motoring correspondent Quentin Willson has a real bee in his bonnet about "Japanese grey imports", secondhand cars from Japan which have found their way on to the UK market.

He followed up a recent item about grey imports on the BBC programme *Hard Cash* with a despairing article in his *Mirror* column on 24 November in which he writes: "Let me simply ask you this question. Would you buy a secondhand car if you can't talk to the previous owner and you don't know if the mileage is genuine, whether it's been involved in any accidents or if it's stolen? The answer has to be an emphatic no."

Another simple question Willson might like to answer is was he or was he not fined £800 at Coalville magistrate's court in 1988 after admitting eight offences of applying and selling a car with false descriptions, including advertising the Vauxhall Cavalier with 27,000 miles on the clock when it had really done over 100,000?

O·B·N

CRINGE-MAKING sycophancy towards "new" Labour is the hallmark of the *Mirror* under Piers Moron. Week in, week out, the leader columns drool slavishly over Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

The *arslikhan* reached staggering new heights, however, on 22 November when the *Moron* opined: "PM's tough talking hits the target... Three cheers for Tony Blair. Yesterday he came out fighting and delivered a trio of knock-out blows... Whack! He thumped Margaret Thatcher... Whack! He crushed Tory leader William Hague... Whack! He smashed the anti-European newspapers... This is the fighting talk we want from the Prime Minister. It is exactly what is needed for strong government and another big election win."

Perish the thought that as the DTI looks further into the share-dealing scandal at the paper, Moron wants to consolidate his friendships in high places.

THE winner of a special journalists' edition of Anne Robinson's *The Weakest Link* (which will not go on air) was Jon Plunkett, TV news editor of the *Sun* at the time.

Plunkett outsmarted such journalistic luminaries as the *Independent's* David Lister, the *Grauniad's* Matt Wells and Caitlin Moran from the *Times* to win the heated contest. His winning streak was shortlived, however. No sooner had he returned to Wapping than he was given the boot by a callous superior who told him: "You are the weakest link, goodbye."

Plugged In

"Woodward was able to watch his own private replays and access live statistics throughout the match thanks to his own interactive television monitor provided by Sky Sports..."

Sunday Times report on England's rugby union victory over Australia, 19 November.

Nominated by Gnome.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

PROSPECTIVE authors would be well-advised to watch out for the curse of the *Currant Bun*. The most recent scribbler to become afflicted is Victoria Newton, the *Sun's* gal in the Big Apple and the world's number one authority on Catherine Zeta Jones.

Not only did she pen the *Sun's* entire coverage of Zeta's charming wedding to Michael Douglas, but back in July the red-top ran an exclusive serialisation of Newton's sensational new book "Zeta: The Unauthorised True Story". Unfortunately to date "the blockbuster biography everyone will be talking about" has not actually been published.

WORLD OF SPORT

KEN BATES, obnoxious chairman of Chelsea football club, faces a rough ride from shareholders when he appears at the annual meeting of his company, Chelsea Village, on 30 November.

For the third time in four years, Bates's Chelsea Village plc has reported a trading loss – this time of £3.5m – despite the football team making an estimated £20m from last season's foray into the European Champions' League. With the two Bates Motels off the Fulham Road operating well under capacity, things are looking very bleak at Chelsea – especially since Bates sacked Gianluca Vialli, the most successful manager in the club's history. Now, the team is playing like mid-table mediocrities and has already been knocked out of lucrative European competition.

Perhaps that is why, last week, Chelsea was forced to sell star striker Tore Andre Flo for £12m to Glasgow Rangers.

But the treatment of Bates at Chelsea Village could be nothing like the vigorous questioning he should expect when MPs start to delve into how the bearded wonder, as chairman of Wembley National Stadium Ltd (WNSL), has been able to award a £325m construction contract for the new English National Stadium to a firm, Multiplex, which managed to undercut all rival British developers, including its former partner, Bovis.

Multiplex, from Australia, was involved in the building of the Olympic Stadium in Sydney. But it is new to Britain. Its senior officials, when they first came to London, stayed in rooms at the £160-a-night Chelsea Village Hotel, part of Bates's Chelsea Village empire that includes his football club. Multiplex's first British offices were located at – you've guessed it – Chelsea Village. And its only previous experience of building in Britain is a modest £40m project to construct a new stand at – Stamford Bridge, home to Chelsea football club, whose chairman is: Ken Bates.

In discussions over the Wembley contract, Bates declared an interest. But he remained in the negotiations, although as chairman he might not have expected to exercise anything other than the casting vote.

Bates is proud of his reputation as a man who "gets things done". Since he took the helm of the ill-fated Wembley project, the projected costs have soared nearly threefold, to £660m – more than the combined costs of Paris's Stade de France, Sydney's Olympic Stadium, the new Arsenal ground at King's Cross, and three of Sunderland's Stadium of Light. No one, other than Bates, can understand why the new Wembley needs to cost so much. Bates says he wants to build the best stadium in the world – but since he became chairman schemes for a complex of hotels and offices have been added on, hiking the overall costs and making the new Wembley begin to look like a bigger version of Bates's failing Chelsea Village.

The only money Bates has "raised" towards Wembley has been the £120m of lottery money that met the cost of buying the site. The original deadline from the government for having the rest of the capital in place was the end of March. Now, Chase Manhattan, the merchant bank seeking the finance for the rest of the project, has moved the deadline back from the beginning to the end of December.

Bates was given the job as chairman of WNSL – an offshoot of the Football Association – when Tony Banks, the Chelsea-supporting Labour MP, was minister for sport. If Banks thought he was mugged for a few quid in London recently, he might want to consider what Bates is doing to London now.

THE *Eye's* prediction of a shortfall in sponsorship for the 2002 Commonwealth games in Manchester (*Eye* 1014) did not go down well with the organisers, prompting a snotty letter from the marketing and communications manager of Manchester 2002, Gary Best (*Eye* 1015).

While the *Eye* pointed out that only £18m in sponsorship had been raised so far, with a target of £62m (£12m is expected from ticket sales and merchandising), Mr Best argued that: "Talks with further sponsors and overseas TV companies are well advanced."

Since he penned this huffy response, one of the officials in charge of finding sponsorship for the games has told the *Grauniad* that those in the know are predicting a £20m shortfall, partly because of the negative influence the dome has had on potential sponsors.

THE sighs of relief from Downing Street were audible as the government, defying some lurid predictions, managed to hold three seats in last week's "Super Thursday" by-elections, albeit on a pisspoor turnout.

Of the three, West Bromwich seemed the most vulnerable – until a posse of British National Party louts decided to tour Asian districts in a loudspeaker van. Preston seemed problematic following the selection of on-message Blairite and former MEP Mark Hendrick, who offended many local worthies with off-the-cuff remarks about the town's previous MP, the distinctly non-Blairite Audrey Wise.

On top of these successes came news that the party hierarchy might just avoid a damaging by-election battle – and one in which it was likely to be the loser – in the Falkirk West constituency of rebel MP and Scotch thistle lookalike Denis Canavan. He had been blocked from standing for the Scottish parliament (see *Eyes passim*) by a Scots Labour selection committee troika which included long established fixers Ernie Ross MP and Rosemary McKenna MP. But now, with Dewar gone, his successor Henry McCleish had seemed amenable to a Canavan return to the Labour fold.

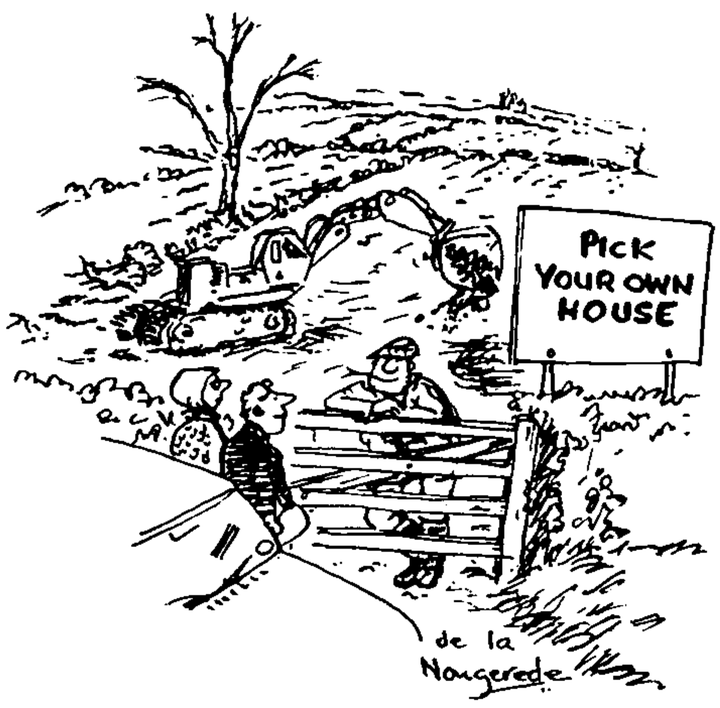
Until all of a sudden Canavan changed his mind, citing new evidence of Tony Blair's personal involvement in his [Canavan's] original exclusion order. So now Labour faces the crucial by-election in Falkirk West that it was so determined to avoid. The irony is that Blair probably did *not* have a hand in the earlier decision to block "The Thistle" from Labour's candidates' lists. In fact Blair had acted with some alarm upon hearing the extent of Donald Dewar's purge hit list. At his insistence, leftwing Dundee MP John McCallion was saved the same fate as Canavan.

Little of this cuts much ice north of the border where voters long ago decided that Tony Blair was Maggie Mk II and a control freak to boot. As an independent candidate at the first elections to the Scottish parliament, Canavan had romped home, easily polling the best result of any candidate standing. Labour's nightmare is that whoever Canavan endorses in his old Falkirk constituency will also romp home to Westminster in the looming by-election.

MARTIN SALTER, the in yer face Reading MP, has acted as cheerleader for Labour rebels wanting to take a stand against the partial sell-off of the National Air Traffic Control System, or NATS.

In the build-up to the Commons debate on John Prescott's plans on 16 November, Salter was to be found in the tearooms busily urging his colleagues to rebel in the votes to be taken later that evening.

Thirty or so MPs were willing to risk the wrath of government whips to do so. But as the rebels queued to take their places on the "No" lobby for the second time, they noticed that Salter had not actually joined them. The pilots' champion had in fact voted against the government in the first vote but was strangely absent from the second.



FEARFUL of being associated with failure, Labour apparatchiks are now busily denying that they had any connection with Al Gore's election campaign.

This is no easy task. For much of the year Blairite groupies such as Philip Gould were shuttling across the Atlantic to visit the Gore HQ and boasting that they hoped to copy his campaigning techniques over here. As the *Daily Telegraph* reported in April, following a Millbank briefing, "Tony Blair's advisers are already consulting the Democrats about New Labour's strategy for the next election."

Observers at the Democratic convention in Los Angeles this August included the Labour general secretary Margaret McDonagh and up-and-coming MP Douglas Alexander, a close chum of Gordon Brown. "We are looking at the issue of compassionate conservatism and at ways to expose the myth of it," they said.

Blair's office was also in close touch with Bob Shrum, one of Gore's main advisers. He told them they should attack Hague as a right-wing extremist whose tax figures didn't add up, since Gore's attempts to do the same with Bush had been a huge success. *Whoops!*

Number crunching

£350,000

■ compensation given to former British servicewoman asked to leave the navy when she became pregnant.

£10,000

■ compensation given to former British servicemen who suffered starvation, torture and slave labour in Japanese POW camps.

THE threat of a backbench rebellion over the closure of community health councils (CHCs) as part of the NHS national plan has clearly shaken Tony Blair.

When Tory MP Stephen O'Brien asked if he would drop the plan, Blair replied: "I am aware that there is bitter opposition, which is why proposals are being consulted on… We will report back to the House in due course on the consultation."

How peculiar, in the light if this statement, that health minister Gisela Stuart only agreed to meet members of the Association of Community Health Councils of England and Wales (ACHCEW) on the understanding that she would not be reviewing the decision to abolish CHCs.

When the ACHCEW cited the legal opinion given to them by Richard Gordon QC that the planned abolition was flawed because there had been no consultation, she retorted: "We do not accept that ACHCEW or community health councils had any legitimate expectation to be consulted in relation to the proposal that CHCs should be abolished."

This puts Blair's answer in parliament in a very odd light. Perhaps he was just saying the first thing that came into his head. Or perhaps he was confusing the new consultation-free Gisela Stuart with the old Gisela Stuart who was so keen on CHCs that she told a meeting of community health representatives last June that: "CHCs will be essential in ensuring the representation of patients during the implementation of the National Plan and in the new NHS."

AFTER London Labour officials overheard that half a dozen Dagenham members planned to offer their services to neighbouring MP John Cryer in highly marginal Hornchurch, the comrades were subjected to a stern lecture.

As if they needed reminding, they were told about the "need to win the next election" before being advised to go and help anywhere but Hornchurch and help anybody but the off-message Cryer.

SO how did Clive Soley hang in there as chairman of the parliamentary Labour party with no visible means of support from the muttering backbenches?

As the Ealing Acton MP saw off two powerful challenges from former foreign office minister Tony Lloyd and truculent Thurrock MP Andrew Mackinlay, an explanation was immediately at hand in the tearooms. Labour whips hadn't needed to "strong arm" the ministerial pay roll vote – that might have been "counter-productive" – they simply reminded the jobsworths of their duty.

None of this has impressed Mackinlay supporters in particular: they wonder what happened to the rule that prevented the pay roll vote from taking part in PLP elections at the time of the last Labour government. Perhaps Soley will try to find out for them in time for the next meeting of the PLP.

REPLETE with ethnic, British Airways-style wall hangings, the Thatcher Room in the newly opened Portcullis House is available for meetings of select committees or groups of MPs.

Except that the room has remained strangely vacant since it was opened – in direct contrast to the Jo Grimond Room next door, which is constantly abuzz with MPs.

'Backbiter'

AD NAUSEAM

FOUR NEW poster advertisements for the Labour Party have gone up all over the country, each with a picture of some very ordinary person congratulating themselves for voting "new" Labour, eg: "I did it. I created new jobs for a million people." At the bottom it says: "If you voted for New Labour in 1997 – thank you."

Never mind whether any of the statements are actually true (the "figures" come from the various government departments, so it seems unlikely); never mind why they have appeared at this particular moment; what really irks about these ads is their tone. Few recent campaigns have so effortlessly combined the patronising with the self-congratulatory, selling boasting as thanking as if we don't get it.

TBWA is the agency responsible. Hired last year, it was around that time that its creative head claimed TBWA was "reinventing the poster". If this is the future, bring back Shake n'Vac.

Then again, called upon to produce a nothing poster campaign as their first work, perhaps we should pity TBWA. In the run-up to an election up to 40 percent of an agency's staff can find themelves working for a client that brings in precious little fees and a whole lot of hassle. As ever with "new" Labour, every government committee reports to 10 more, meaning that a concrete decision on a new campaign can take months. And of course, there's always Mandy or Gordon to intervene at the eleventh hour: we know what a stickler Peter is for presentation. All in all, the "new" Labour account is seen as a poisoned chalice. Or a "steaming cauldron of piss" as one ad industry insider elegantly put it.

"I take Private Eye to relax. They've always got a good line on PY the Gerbil and his millennium tent. They've got a really good sense of humour, I think." — Pierre-Yves Gerbil, The Guardian, 20 November 2000

ON SALE NOW. *Son of Blair – The Sequel*
The new *St Albion Parish News*

IN THE TEAROOM

JUST when the country was beginning to wonder whether it still had a foreign secretary, the little bundle of ginger fur bounces in to announce he's back.

Robin Cook has spent much of the year 2000 in the shadows, leaving Keith Vaz and Peter Hain to mind the shop. But he hasn't been idle. Robin Cook has cast himself as sage counsellor to Madeleine Albright – and therefore, in his own estimation at least, as one of the most important people in the whole wide world.

The canny US secretary of state understands just how much attention to invest in insecure politicians to assuage their vanity and is a suave enough diplomat not to betray even a flicker of annoyance at our foreign secretary's outrageous pomposity.

One reason for Cook's extended silence has been the habit of treasury spinners to slap him down whenever he mentions the word "Europe". Until now they didn't even need the chancellor's sanction: they just did it on autopilot. No longer, however. When they poured cold water over the foreign secretary's latest pronouncements, they failed to realise that Cook was part of a concert party fixed up by Number 10 including Geoff Hoon, Michael "Mr Patriotism" Wills and Tony Blair himself. Rapped knuckles in Number 11.

Of course Robin Cook could not leave it at that. He has "psychological flaws" of his own and just has to rub the chancellor's face in it. Allies of Cook have been touring the tearoom moaning that Brown has got the spending and electoral cycles out of synch. If Cook had been chancellor, they argue, the benefits of extra spending would be felt by now. Since the foreign secretary hasn't got a prayer of stealing Gordon Brown's job, what is the point of it all?

The truth is that as dysfunctional relationships at the heart of government go, the Cook/Brown relationship is even more disfigured by seething jealousies than Brown/Blair or Brown/Mandy. The difference is that in this case it isn't the chancellor who's the smouldering volcano of resentment. Try explaining to the PM the deep background to this grudge – how it all goes back to murky goings on in Edinburgh in the 1970s – and he puts his hands over his ears, saying: "I just don't want to know."

'Urqhart'

Sunday 17th December 2000

John Prescott appearing as ELVIS

Village Hotel, Headingley, Leeds

9.0 **The Real Prince Philip** (T)
Continuing Channel 4's Hallowe'en horror season. 17016054

Grauniad

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE reopening of the terrace of Somerset House to the public is a great boon and a great triumph. For years the bureaucrats who used one of the finest public buildings in Britain as a giant car park kept the public out with various lies, ensuring that the promenade designed by Sir William Chambers to overlook the Thames had no purpose. Now, with most of Somerset House opened for various worthy cultural uses, we too can enjoy the view.

Of course the view from the terrace today is not quite as depicted in Thomas Malton's lovely contemporary aquatint, but the great dome of St Paul's Cathedral is still there to the east, now artfully complimented by the thrusting Nat West Tower. Soon there will be another exciting vertical feature to enhance the prospect of the City of London: the 600ft-high skyscraper at 110 Bishopsgate designed by the American firm of Kohn Pedersen Fox, which will rise not just next to but *partly behind* Wren's dome.

How can this be? The important views of St Paul's are meant to be sacrosanct under what feeble legislation there is to protect a skyline — long lost — which was once the admiration of Europe. But official concern is with the views from Waterloo Bridge, from which the silhouette of the dome will remain unsullied. Who cares about the view from Somerset House?

Suddenly London is awash with, or should I say studded with, towers. English Heritage is disgracefully allowing Norman Foster's sheath to rise on the site of the poor old Baltic Exchange (*Eyes passim*); there is this gratuitous tower in Bishopsgate; Railtrack — that dynamic property developer whose style is somewhat cramped by having to maintain railway track between potential sites — has ideas on Waterloo and Paddington, while the architects of the London Eye are talking about a 72-storey tower…

"New" Labour loves its ennobled architects, when it comes to something serious like government policy Richard and Norman suddenly find themselves impotent. My Lord Rogers, figurehead of the urban task force, in pursuing his vision of making everywhere more like Barcelona, has rightly been proposing radical political and fiscal measures to encourage urban regeneration. And the long-awaited urban white paper has let him and all of us down: Gordon Brown and the treasury have made sure of that. The crucial demand that VAT be harmonised — at 5 percent — on conversions of existing buildings and the building of new houses on green field sites has been rejected. New houses are zero rated — so why bother with the inner-city?

And then there is the continuing outrage of imposing VAT at 17.5 percent on the repair (not conversion, or mutilation) of listed buildings. Yes Gordon Brown has responded to his Presbyterian conscience and says he wants to exempt churches from this crippling deterrent. Good. But not all listed buildings are churches. What about the private individuals struggling to maintain something which, in a sense, belongs to us all? And if the European commission will let him remove VAT on repairing churches it can be done for all listed historic buildings — if the government cared.

But it doesn't. Meanwhile the view of the most celebrated historic building in London — St Paul's — is going further to be spoiled by our government's enthusiasm for the new, the big, and the unnecessary.

EXCUSE ME. The London* Evening Standard *is rightly pleased with itself over its campaign to shame the British Museum over the cover-up of the wrong nasty French stone being used instead of incomparable Portland. Yet for the paper to claim as it did on 16 November that "on 24 August, the newspaper revealed for the first time that the museum had been duped by the portico contractor" is a bit much.

The fraud was first exposed* in this column *almost a year earlier, in September 1999 in* Eye 984, *as we had been told that both museum and architects — Foster Associates — had long been informed about the mistake. At that stage the offending stone could easily have been replaced; but, instead, both decided that it didn't much matter, that they could get away with it.

Nor is this a trivial matter, as apologists for the trustees maintain. If an institution like the BM cannot be bothered to do things right and is allowed to get away with it, why should local authorities and English Heritage tell individual owners how to treat listed buildings?

'Piloti'

IN THE COURTS

AS a candidate for a star witness in a trial involving drugs in sport, Linford Christie, the Olympic gold medallist who has tested positive for banned drugs on at least two occasions, must come pretty low on anyone's list. But as Diane Modahl played "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire" in London's high court last week, Christie was there on her behalf, telling the world on oath how offended he was by the allegations against him.

Modahl is the former Commonwealth 800 metres champion who is suing the former British athletics governing body for £1m in lost earnings, damages and costs, following her ban in 1994 after a drug test in Portugal produced an adverse result for the hormone testosterone. A five-person disciplinary panel, appointed by the British Athletic Federation (BAF), decided that since Modahl's testosterone ratio in the dope test that was 42 times above the norm there were good reasons to impose a four-year ban.

It was shortly after the decision was handed down that Christie phoned up his athletics team mate to commiserate with her, and to tell her that the chairman of her disciplinary panel, Dr Martyn Lucking, had once had the audacity to tell Britain's self-proclaimed Greatest Ever Athlete that he suspected him of using drugs. Even at the time, this was hardly an earth-shattering assumption, since at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul Christie had escaped a ban when he was "given the benefit of the doubt" after testing positive for the stimulant pseudo-ephedrine.

Modahl was reinstated for racing in 1995, after she produced new evidence about faulty procedures at the Portuguese testing lab. Since then she has been through four years of legal wrangling in an attempt to sue the BAF, which has long since gone into administration.

The only grounds Modahl's solicitor, Anthony Julius, from Mishcon de Reya, was allowed to sue on were the alleged bias against her of Lucking and one other panel member. So Christie, a proven cheat who tested positive only last year for massive doses of banned anabolic steroids, strode into court as Modahl's star witness. Despite having two contemporaneous written records presented as evidence of Christie's shouting match with Lucking at Gateshead in June 1990, the former sprinter was able to flex his selective memory over his clash with Lucking, describing the doctor's and another official's written reports as "complete rubbish".

One interesting admission from Christie was that he had told Lucking during their spat that he would in future refuse to give officials his training address when away on warm weather training – an offence which a decade ago carried a four-year ban. But Andrew Green, barrister for the BAF, never asked Christie about his positive drugs tests, and he omitted to challenge the ex-sprinter when Christie maintained under oath, "I'm the most tested athlete ever".

In the early 1990s, when the British athletics team captain was at his competitive peak, the BAF neglected to pass Christie's home address on to the drug testers at the Sports Council, making it virtually impossible for the sprinter to undergo the sort of no-notice, out-of-competition test that is most effective at catching dope cheats.

Maybe Green had other things on his mind – like how Modahl, never a star of the international track circuit who might expect to earn £50,000 in a good year, could seriously sue for nearly £500,000 in lost earnings for her year of suspension, at a time when she was in any case pregnant.

E!TV

The Last Morse (ITV)
I Don't Believe It (BBC1)
40 Years On Coronation Street (ITV)

ANYONE who's ever accidentally found themselves sharing a hotel with the AGM and prize-giving of a double-glazing firm knows that professional celebrations are rarely as much fun for outsiders.

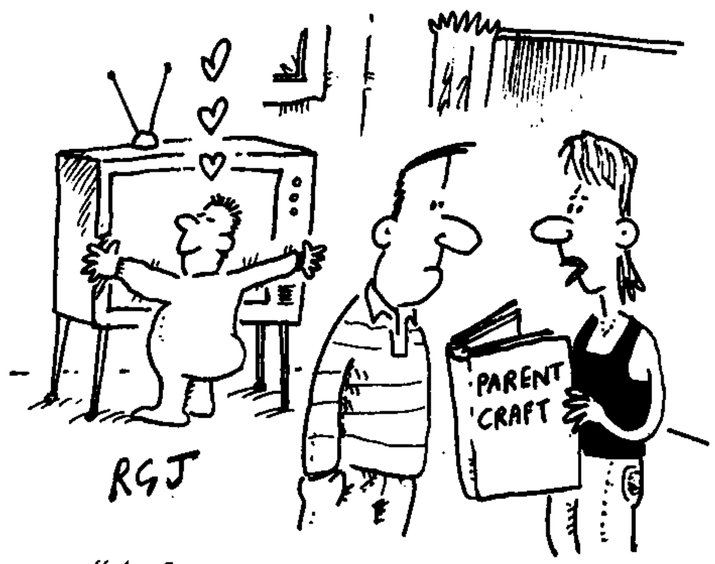
Unfortunately television has the means to inflict its corporate back-slapping on the general population. The annual peak-time transmission of the BAFTA awards is the televisual equivalent of vanity publishing and the imprint is, unfortunately, stepping up production. The curse of November in the schedules has been shows about the shows.

As if there weren't enough hype in the newspapers for the farewell episodes of *Inspector Morse* and *One Foot In The Grave*, the companies indulged in some internal inflation. **The Last Morse** and I Don't Believe It were dreary corporate videos in which the writers expressed surprise at how well the thing had done and the interviews with the actors reminded viewers why they usually speak other people's lines.

40 Years On Coronation Street, though, was the worst example in this regard and, specifically, self-regard. The commentary, for example, was given to Sir John Mills whose delivery of lines about "this unique and much-loved television programme" could have been sliced, covered with mustard and served on baps in the Rover's Return. Why had Sir John been asked? Because the oldest surviving Equity veteran traditionally voices programmes about such national events as The Second World War, the monarchy and a long-running television soap opera.

The low-point came when the show's creator Tony Warren revealed that, in 1960, "Edna in wardrobe, who was more than a bit psychic", had surprised everyone by predicting that the news series "will last longer than The Archers". It was pretty typical of the programme's sloppiness that this anecdote was presented as evidence of Edna's supernatural powers whereas, in fact, her claim has not yet come true and may never.

And nobody wants to stick up for critics but they are at least people paid to analyse why television works. The analysis here consisted of ITV celebs – Cilla, Richard & Judy – revealing what the Street meant to them. Cilla and her late husband had once got Concorde back from New York in order to be home for an episode. (Poor chuck, someone buy her a video recorder.) And Cliff Richard, in an anecdote solipsistic even for a luvvie, explained that he had embarked on the diet and exercise regime which has him even today feeling like a young boy because Minnie Caldwell on *The Street* had once referred to "that chubby Cliff Richard".



"At this age he should be starting to show affection"

But the *Street* was more than The Show That Saved Cliff's Hips. Cast in the professorial role was Frank Skinner who asserted that, when he was "doing Shakespeare at college", they'd made a big fuss about the Bard being able to do comedy and tragedy in the same play and yet "they do that on *Coronation Street* three times a week". Professor Skinner also suggested that the series was "just as good as Ken Loach and that stuff".

While it was disappointing that the style and content of this documentary so demonstrated ITV's loss of nerve, it was appropriate because *Coronation Street* itself has followed the same journey. The clips from the early years were a risky inclusion because they confirmed that Prof Skinner was right. The series had indeed once been dramatically pioneering and politically radical.

The Ena Sharples speech from the first ever episode about religious practice in the north really did place the programme in the tradition of *Look Back In Anger* and *Cathy Come Home*. The problem was that these scenes emphasised the drop in what we've got now: outbreaks of stage northernness interspersed with desperate attempts at contemporary relevance such as Hayley the trans-sexual.

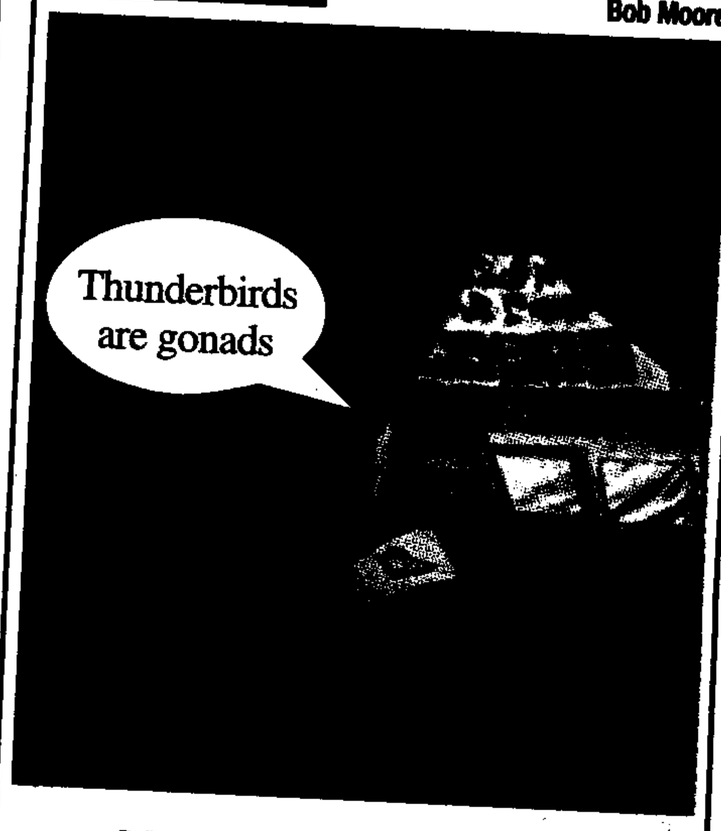
It was sadly fitting that this back-pat programme should be broadcast halfway through a week in which the *News Of The World* had a front-page exclusive about one of the *Corrie* cast having a benign cyst removed and ITV was screening *Coronation Street* every single night, using the 40th birthday as an excuse for a move in the ratings war with BBC1.

This is what a once daring series has become: fodder for the tabloids and a ratings weapon inevitably reduced in power by being fired too often. (All soaps are worn down by over-use. BBC1 has done it to *EastEnders*, Channel 4 to *Brookside*.) The pantomime in television companies every Christmas should be *The Golden Goose*.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



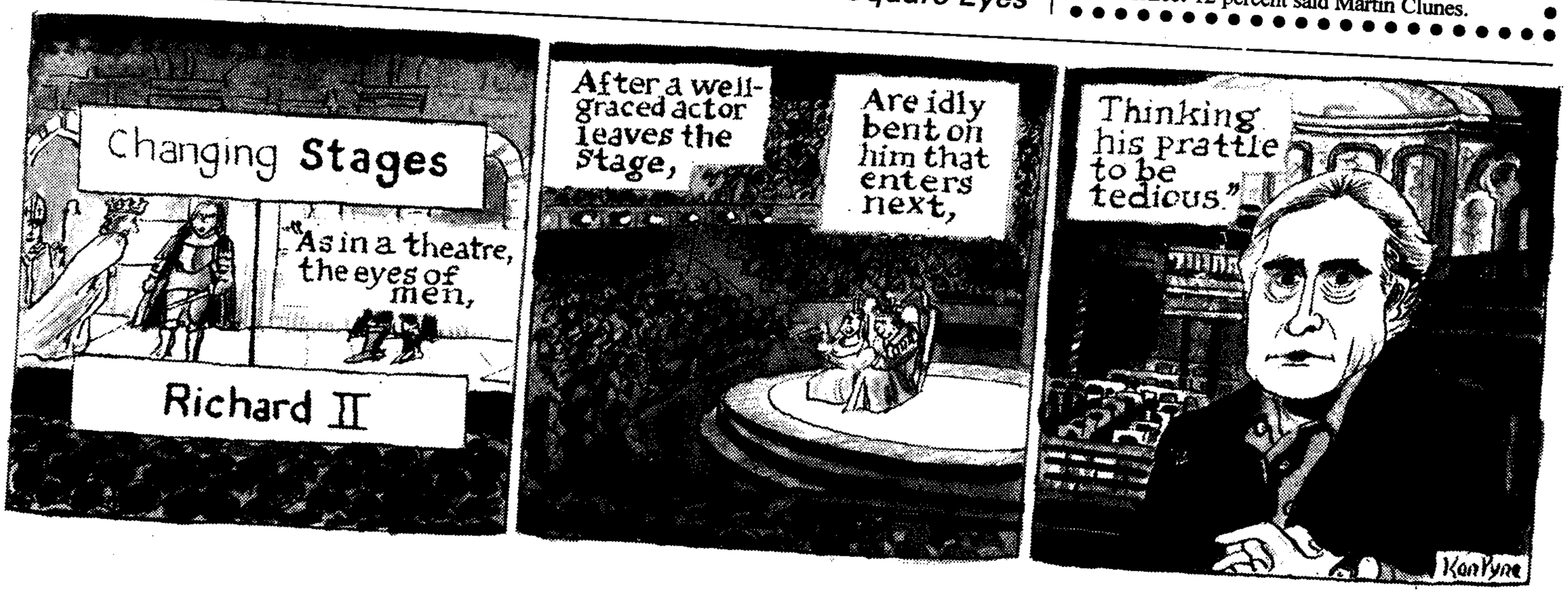
Virgil Tracey Emin

DUMB BRITAIN

This Morning, ITV
Judy Finnigan: How many wheels does a unicycle have?
Contestant: Two.
Judy: How many minutes are there in three quarters of an hour?
Contestant: 60.

The Weakest Link, BBC2
Anne Robinson: In which century was Hadrian's Wall built?
Contestant: The 18th century.
AR: In what part of the human body would you find the femur?
Contestant: The ears.
AR: Complete the title of this Oliver Goldsmith novel: *The Vicar of...*
Contestant: Dibley.
AR: In the animal kingdom, what is a John Dory?
Contestant: A rabbit.

Who Wants To Be A Millionaire
Tarrant (*asking the audience*): "Jambon" is the French for which food?
Audience: 11 percent said jam.
Tarrant: Audience, who wrote the novel *Wives and Daughters*?
Audience: 49 percent said Jane Austen. (The contestant agreed with the audience and lost £7,000.)
Tarrant: Audience, who is the famous son-in-law of the actor Tony Booth?
Audience: 12 percent said Martin Clunes.


Changing Stages
"As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
Richard II
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious."
Ken Pyne

MEDIA NEWS

WHEN the *News of the Screws* began its outing campaign against suspected paedophiles, BBC's *Newsnight* – like almost every other broadcasting outfit – was quick to bundle critics of the scheme in front of a camera to point out the obvious: that the scheme would drive paedophiles underground, make convictions harder to come by and risk a rash of reprisals from vigilantes.

An academic turned up to condemn the "pure hysteria" of the *Screws* campaign. The programme even interviewed an unidentified sex offender who spoke of his terror of being "named and shamed": "If my picture appears and I am outed, quite likely I'm a dead man," he said.

But behind the scenes *Newsnight* was already working on its own investigation of a child abuser, who was clearly identified in the resulting film, broadcast on 20 November. The film led to arrests rather than a lynching, but it also led to the abandonment of another trial, this time of a man accused of raping his daughters because "the jury could be prejudiced" by the programme.

IN AN effort to reduce revolving door chaos at the BBC's Stage Six News Centre, managers with nothing better to do and money to burn have created a designer "Turnstile User Guide".

Fashioned from glossy card with a hip concertina format, the guides employ a natty, graduated colour scheme to explain how not to get trapped in revolving doors. The licence-payers who have funded this initiative will find tons of them at reception, mostly awaiting the bin men, who come on Thursdays.

No fewer than seven precision diagrams depict a person using a revolving door, accompanied by instructions on how to "enter the building" and, at no extra cost, how to "leave the building".

But what happens if there is a simultaneous entry/exit crisis? "To improve the flow you can share the same turnstile, however each user must activate their door independently. If not all occupants will be reversed out – any enquiries, please phone the Service Centre on x64600".

WHY are almost all the black women employed by the BBC either carrying a mop or a bottle of toilet bleach? If you want an answer to this teaser you will need to keep abreast of the growing number of groups within the corporation to write to, all of whom, alas, are too busy networking to do anything about this imbalance.

For while there has been little change in the composition of the workforce that carries out the most disagreeable chores in broadcasting – cleaning *Panorama*'s khazi for one – newly styled "diversification" teams are rapidly growing in number and profile elsewhere for a second time.

Now there are new "diversity implementation groups" fanning across news, not to mention a "new diversity centre, led by Linda Mitchell", as well as several diversity roadshows comprising lots of screens covered in photos of minority groups *not* carrying mops or toilet bleach. There's also a women's development initiative, a news diversity group, oh, and a women in news network, as well as a diversity database.

GOING LIVE

ITV's Eamonn Holmes went live to Los Angeles-based reporter Helen Morton to catch the latest on Catherine Zeta Jones's wedding to Michael Douglas. It was 3am in LA.

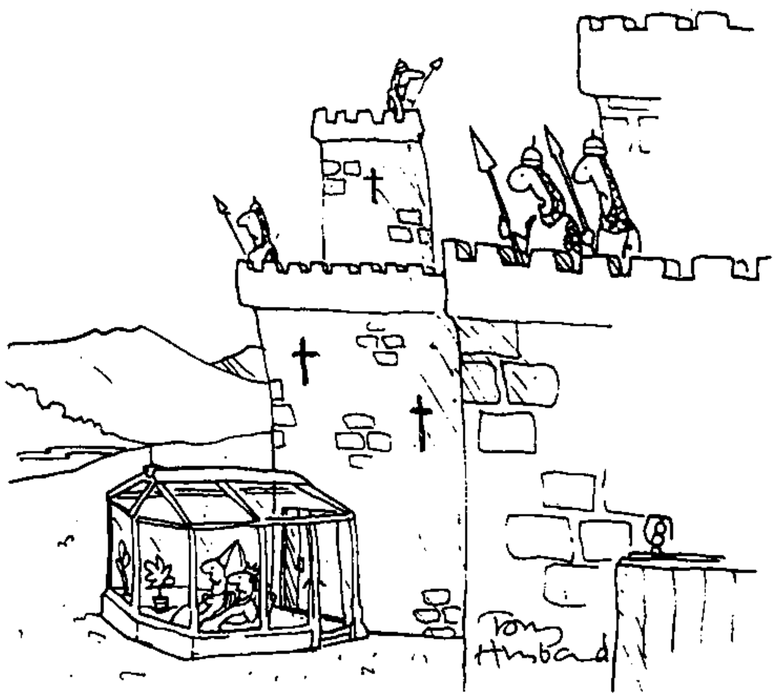
Eamonn asked: "Did you see the couple?" The answer, unsurprisingly, was "no".

In fact there was so little for Morton to report that Holmes was forced to prompt her by reading out the Sun's front page – "It says they've been locked in their suite for 12 hours," he reminded Morton.

"Well they're either doing what honeymooners do or they're having a sleep," the hapless hackette confirmed.

MORE headaches for the celebrated party-planner Justin Etzin, the 24-year-old who made his name organising teenage parties attended by such famous sprogs as Prince William and Euan Blair.

As we revealed in *Eye* 997, his company Capital



"It's very nice, but defensively I think the conservatory will be our weak point"

VIP Events (which changed its name to Eventtime) recently went into liquidation. The unpaid creditors included the Guardian Media Group, *Hello!* and *Tatler* – the last of which had featured Justin as a brilliant youthful entrepreneur.

Etzin resigned as a director of Eventtime last year, shortly before the company keeled over. He did a similar quick get-away from another venture, the Capital VIP Group Ltd, before that too went bust. But will this be enough to save him?

The *Eye* has obtained a letter sent to Eventtime's creditors on 7 November by the liquidator, Stephen Franklin of Panos Eliades Franklin & Co. Although Eventtime's debts amount to more than £156,000, Franklin reports that the company's only assets are "debtors with an estimated realisable value of £1,500 and office furniture with an estimated realisable value of £500, but there have been no realisations".

It seems none of the creditors will get a penny. And it gets worse. Franklin has had to report certain matters to the department of trade and industry, he says, and disqualification proceedings may follow. To what or whom can he be referring?

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WITH the thoroughness only a close-knit, feudal operation like Glyndebourne could envisage, a wall of silence has been thrown around the reasons for the abrupt departure of general director Nicholas Snowman after less than two years in the job.

But as a Glyndebourne mole broke ranks to say last week, it comes down to the fact that he was "a petty tyrant who arrived with plans to turn this place upside down, imagining he was in charge. But he wasn't. And he found out the hard way."

From the moment he arrived at Glyndebourne Snowman made himself unpopular by getting rid of much-admired administrative staff like Sarah Playfair who had run the Glyndebourne Tour very successfully. For a while the Christie family, who own the place and had appointed Snowman, stood aside and let things happen. But the crunch came when they realised that, for reasons of his own aggrandisement, he was trying to turn Glyndebourne into a home for superstar artists it couldn't afford.

He set up a "special relationship" with the Russian conductor Valery Gergiev that was meant to start next season with a grand and glitzy *Otello*. Then, after everything had been announced, there were disagreements over money. Gergiev withdrew. The stars withdrew. And Glyndebourne is now left with an *Otello* nobody will want to hear because the only substitutes it could find at such short notice are either undistinguished or unknown. In the wake of this humiliating muddle, Snowman had to go.

The only surprise is that he wasn't dispatched earlier, because the Christies have spent the past six months freezing him out. Important planning meetings have been held in his absence. And there was a bizarre incident back in the spring when the Christies gave a pre-season party for performers, staff and friends but didn't even tell Snowman it was happening. He discovered by accident and spent the day of the party hanging around the Christie house, waiting for the invitation that never came.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Pseuds Corner

I have spent my life in service to these two sacred sets of work. The gift of human passion in William Shakespeare and the gift of human freedom enshrined in the American bill of human rights.

CHARLTON HESTON
speaking at the Oxford Union

Born: Feb 5, 1948, in Torsby, Sweden
Family: Married
Hobby: Reading Tibetan poetry

Daily Telegraph 'factfile' on Sven Goran Eriksson

It's usually Radio 5 in the car, but I've got a CD player in there too. I know some people say footballers have terrible taste in music, but I would dispute that. In the car at the moment I've got the Corrs, Cher, Phil Collins, Shania Twain and Rod Stewart.

ANDY GRAY,
Sunday Times Magazine

The French have always been good at sex as art. Like the best food, carnality is invested with intimations of the "au-dela" or the transcendental. Buggery, for instance, isn't just buggery. Done in the correct poetic framework it becomes Faure's Requiem, Renoir's Umbrellas, the Versailles Hall of Mirrors, Last Tango in Paris.

A friend of mine once got picked up by a man in Paris on Beaujolais Nouveau night and was taken back to his studio where they engaged in anal sex. Afterwards, she said, he climbed down from the mezzanine bed, put on Dvorak and made leek soup, which they ate cross-legged on his wooden floor by the light of a candle.

STEPHANIE THEOBALD
The Guardian

The most memorably party I've ever been to happened this summer when we had a blessing for my daughter and her partner at our home in the Sussex countryside... Until then I think the most extraordinary gatherings I had been to had been with the indigenous peoples of North and South America. The one that always sticks in my mind took place in a ravine 100 miles west of Mexico City with a group of Nanhu Indians. Everyone was gathered round in a circle and was required to take a bite from a huge cake made of flour, water, cream and oil. There were no knives or forks or spoons, so when it came to my turn I had to get right the way down to bite the cake. As I did so, several members of the tribe pushed my head down into the cake and I was covered completely. I loved that. As well as putting a smile on everyone's face, it was their way of telling me they don't like anyone to be arrogant.

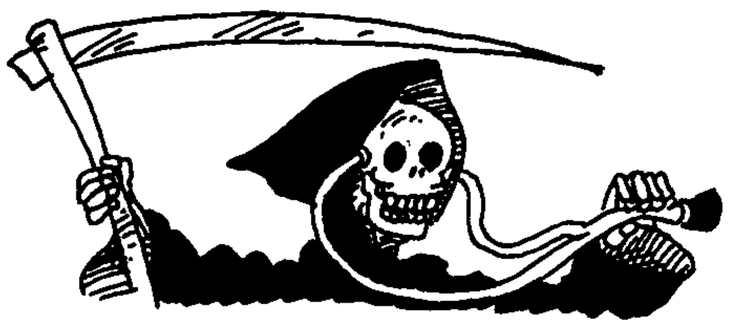
We began my daughter's blessing in a similar spirit. A samba band led her and her partner through the garden. Members of h families walked behind carrying outrag coloured umbrellas. In the middle of group of transvestites dressed in p my 85-year-old mother in to the iment of the music from *The G* everyone in a joyful frame o

ANITA RODDIC
Sainsbury's M

CONTRIBUTORS: G
Ross Campbell, Suz

£10 pa

DOING THE ROUNDS



Body counts

"I AM called eccentric for saying in public that hospitals must find out what their results are, analyse their results, compare their results with other such hospitals... Such opinions will not be eccentric a few years hence." So said surgeon Ernest Codman in, er, 1910. Just 90 years later and most UK hospitals haven't even made it to first base.

Jan Poloniecki, a lecturer in medical statistics at St George's hospital medical school in London, has spent a lot of time proving that hospitals don't even know what their body count is. "The mortuary registers in many UK hospitals are still not computerised but are hand written, and around 20 percent of deaths are missed in audit systems... In consequence a typical hospital will every month send out letters to 20 dead patients reminding them of their appointments. Two of these `patients' will have ambulances come round to pick them up. On one occasion the ambulance and the hearse arrived at the same time."

Poloniecki's most recent study is to analyse body counts after heart surgery at St George's and St Thomas's hospitals. Four patients were incorrectly coded as leaving the hospital alive and less than 80 percent of the deaths at St Thomas's made it on to all the departmental databases and the hospital administration system. This in a specialty that is way ahead of the field in data collection. Overall, the hospital mortality statistics submitted across the NHS for the government's league tables are likely to be very inaccurate and erring on the low side.

The situation at St George's has been improved by installing a computer link from the mortuary to double check the figures, and by taking responsibility for their accuracy locally. In contrast chief medical officer (CMO) Liam Donaldson has persuaded the department of health to set up a critical incident register relying on voluntary reporting to a remote central database. This is a further recipe for inaccuracy and suggests the exercise is little more than cosmetic. Only the statutory reporting of cock-ups to a locally administered register with good statistical input is likely to achieve anything meaningful that can then be compared to other hospitals.

This lack of meaningful information is likely to plague the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) as it endeavours to ensure high quality care in the NHS. Its first two high profile "hits" were at the now closed Garlands Hospital Carlisle, where staff had been beating up patients for years and it was well known in-house, and at Prince Philip Hospital, Llanelli, where a pensioner had a wrong kidney removed many months ago. Whether CHI's ground-breaking recommendations (eg mark X-rays to show which is right and which is left) will make any difference remains to be seen.

A third investigation — at the Oxford Heart Centre — was widely reported as one of CHI's but was in fact commissioned by the NHS Executive south east (NHSESE). It made some headline grabbing assertions about the unit ("on its knees and riven by internal conflict") but was almost devoid of statistical analysis.

The Oxford Heart Centre has already been fingered in the Bristol heart inquiry for failing to submit results to the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons (SCTS) Register.

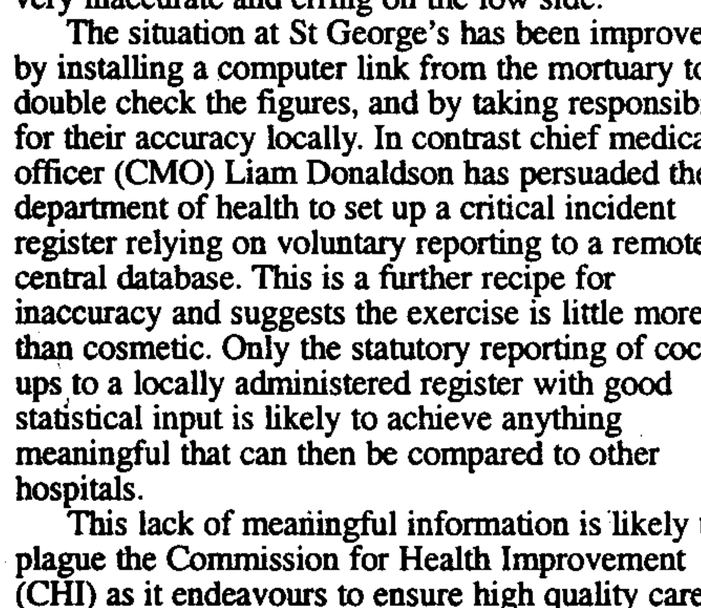
Neither has it bothered to submit results to their newer, risk-stratified National Cardiac and Thoracic Surgical Database (*Eyes passim*) — despite a clear warning in 1998 from the SCTS. As the NHSESE report puts it: "It is not possible to assess the results of a surgeon or a unit without risk stratification and the absence of a system renders both the surgeons and the unit very vulnerable to criticism."

Despite this warning Dr Mike Gill, regional director of public health for NHS South East, felt able to stress that "the review does not call into question the centre's clinical outcomes." This sounds very similar to the bland assurances of the report into heart surgery at the Brompton (*Eyes passim*), which also suffered from a lack of a meaningful computerised database.

So what now for Oxford? As one senior heart surgeon said: "The Regional Health Authority will be keeping a close eye on Oxford but I do not have a lot of confidence in their ability to really control what is going on. There is a real problem with the nursing management too. The Royal College of Nursing will definitely be monitoring their end. The CMO is also keen to know what is happening. And there'll be a visit from CHI."

Why not start with a proper body count?

M.D.



Lets play 'Doctors and Nurses' "

DOWN ON THE FARM

AMID general mass hysteria over the French beef terror, no one has yet noticed the astonishing implications of the decision (into which prime minister Lionel Jospin was bounced by president Jacques Chirac) to ban the feeding of meat and bone meal (MBM) to France's farm animals.

Overnight, the decision created a shortfall of a million tonnes of animal protein equivalent, to be made up from somewhere, to feed France's animals.

The only obvious alternative is soya, eked out with fishmeal. But the world's main supplier of soya is the US, where a million tonnes will soon be even more than US farmers can supply, and where this year's crop is already in the ground so there is no way to increase supplies until next year. Before long there will be a dramatic shortage of soya on the world market, and anyone with money to spare should already have piled into soya futures, since the price will soon be rocketing.

If commissioner Byrne in Brussels surrenders to pressure to make the MBM ban EU-wide, all Europe's farmers could face a major crisis. There is a distinct possibility that there will simply not be enough soya to go round, not just for French farmers but for their British counterparts, who have already had to cope with a total MBM ban since 1996.

As feed prices soar, the price of French beef has fallen so far that for the first time it pays French farmers to declare cases of BSE on their farms, since they can make much more money from the compensation payable to have the whole herd slaughtered. Up to now it has been cheaper just to bury the odd infected cow in the ground (hence the old joke about the French for "BSE" being "JCB"). Stand by therefore for a startling rise in France's BSE rate.

Another consequence of the price collapse is that French farmers are already unloading huge quantities of beef on the British market, much of it shipped through Ireland to be sold as "Irish beef". This is already hitting Britain's own beleaguered beef producers who cannot compete with French dumping prices. So if you want to avoid French BSE it is advisable not to buy "Irish beef" from the supermarkets. And a final point. Most US soya is genetically modified. Whatever Lord Melchett may say, most beef on sale in Britain thus already contains GMOs: another thing you won't see revealed on those supermarket labels.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

SIGNAL FAILURES

THE SHADOW Strategic Rail Authority (sSRA) proclaimed on 25 October: "The rail industry will work together."

Oh no it won't! The new era of cooperation lasted precisely a fortnight. By early November Corbett was pointing the finger at Balfour Beatty, one of Railtrack's maintenance contractors. Then he blamed freight trains for rail cracks like the one that caused the Hatfield accident (see last *Eye*); the Association of train operating companies (Atoc) demanded more compensation from Railtrack; and GB Railways warned of legal action and cash-flow problems if Railtrack didn't pay up quickly.

This is all a repeat, a year on, of the rail industry's reaction to the Ladbroke Grove crash. In October 1999 Corbett said: "We need to get away from the blame culture of the past." The following month he insisted Railtrack was blameless (*Eye* 989) and his company promptly issued a writ against Thames Trains. Thames and First Great Western issued their own claims against Railtrack.

Corbett's decision to leave this bickering is good news — but it won't make the railway less acrimonious. The 100 companies involved *cannot* cooperate, whatever they may say and even believe after a serious accident. The starting point for rail privatisation was competition — between operators and between suppliers — and the necessity of cooperation was only grudgingly admitted in a few legislative concessions. So now the railway is structured for competition — which in most cases cannot happen because of the physical constraints of the network, the guarantees demanded by the financial markets and the bureaucracy surrounding the system.

Cooperation, the opposite of competition, would restore many benefits, including an ability to respond maturely to problems like floods; but it cannot happen while the railway is being pulled in different directions by 100 groups of shareholders. The shadow SRA is so opposed to coordination it boasts of not being a "control and command" (and therefore strategic) organisation.

The worst buck-passers, however, are Tony Blair and John Prescott, who are not doing their jobs but want the public to think they are. Blair called in rail managers for a stiff talk: not out of concern about delays and deaths but because he's worried some mud might stick to him. Prescott, meanwhile, secured headlines that he had "ordered" rail managers to repair the tracks faster. But he ordered nothing. He has no power over most rail companies, who are answerable only to shareholders. Even the rail regulator has his hands tied by the need to keep Railtrack afloat at all costs (*Eye* 1013).

Prescott and Blair have no power because they are too spineless to accept even the tiniest share of responsibility. They knew the privatised system would be unworkable — they said so when it was being devised — but instead of tackling the problem they fell in love with the idea of blaming the Tories and rail managers whenever things go wrong. Instead of renationalising Railtrack, or at least taking Railtrack shares in return for the huge donations of public cash, Labour has merely created its rather pathetic shadow SRA.

● NEWS that Connex has lost the contract to run trains in South Central England from 2003 seems to be a sign that the shadow Strategic Rail Authority (sSRA) is at last listening to customers. But an email sent to senior staff at the French-owned train company by Connex MD Olivier Brousse on the night of the sSRA decision makes it perfectly clear he does not consider this the end of the matter.

Brousse urges his people not to opt for a defeatist "scorched-earth policy", but to pursue the company's five objectives of "performance, safety, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and profit" with renewed vigour. He reveals his strategy: "Go-Via is now the preferred bidder. They have to negotiate a contract with sSRA and sign it, which will take a year at least. If what they have promised appears to be less attractive to what we are currently delivering, then sSRA could decide to come back to us."

Whether this thought has occurred to Brousse entirely independently, or whether it was hinted at by the rail authority, is not clear.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

HOVE TO!

THERE was uproar in Brighton town hall last week when councillors beheld the magnificent figure of King Alfred striding into the public gallery, burnt cakes aloft.

His Majesty was there to celebrate the collapse of Labour-run Brighton & Hove council's plan to lease cheaply a formerly listed seafront building, the King Alfred sports centre in Hove, to developers Citygrove Leisure plc (*Eyes passim*) against strong local opposition.

Citygrove had wanted to stick up an 11-screen multiplex cinema, casino, nightclub, burger bars and huge car park — with a small sports centre tacked on as a sop to protesters. The "exciting" scheme was enthusiastically backed by former council leader "Smokin'" Steve Bassam, now a home office minister in the Lords, and ambitious Hove MP Ivor Caplin.

Citygrove began annual donations to the Labour party and stumped up £25,000 for a "lock-out" agreement to prevent other developers tendering for the job. Alas, opponents of the scheme, alerted by a small contractor unpaid by Citygrove for work elsewhere, began to look into the developer's Byzantine accounts. This revealed a trail of 19 compulsorily-dissolved subsidiaries, £1m in unpaid tax, a secretive Swiss trust fund, a zero credit rating and, amusingly, the £375,000 "surplus" of 1997 appearing in accounts as a minus "prior year adjustment" in 1999.

As protesters picketed September's Labour party conference in Brighton, Citygrove's cash flow problems became even more apparent and the "brand new focus for Hove's social and entertainment scene" was scaled down to little more than a cinema and car park, with the promised sports facilities all but forgotten. Last month, too late to avoid major embarrassment, B&H ditched Citygrove — at a meeting behind closed doors, of course.

BLIND RAGE

ANOTHER example of Labour's comradely approach to internal democracy comes from Knowsley, Merseyside, where Labour councillor Brian Williams got on the wrong side of council leader Jim Keight and his cronies.

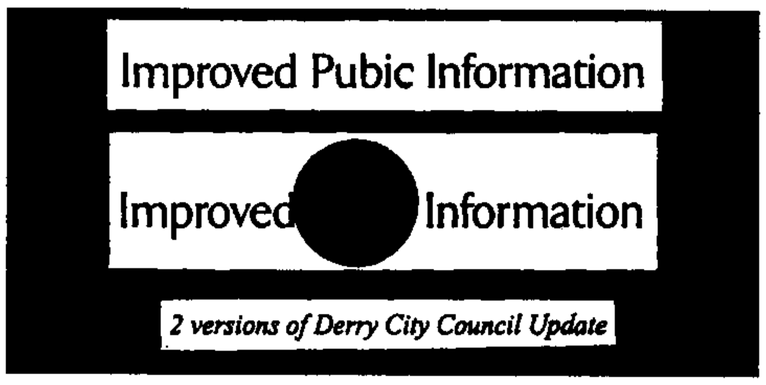
Williams' crime was to speak up for the people he was elected to represent, who oppose selling off the St Kevin's playing fields in Kirkby, one of the few green spaces in a heavily polluted area, for housing development.

Williams's opposition to this and other schemes marked him out as "disloyal" — after all, Labour only held 64 of the 66 seats on the council. He is registered blind, so when he spoke out in a meeting against the playing fields sell-off plan, he was greeted with taunts from supposed colleagues such as "what page are you on?"

After a special room set aside for Williams to do his council work was trashed — the phone was ripped out and all his Braille reading and audio equipment was thrown into the corridor — Williams complained to regional and national Labour party officials, without effect. He and fellow councillor Tommy Rossiter have now quit Labour and set up their own Kirkby Residents Party on Knowsley council — reducing the Labour majority to a mere 62 out of 66.

PS: Not all blind people are treated so harshly in Knowsley. When David Blunkett visited earlier this year he was provided with special information packs in Braille to facilitate his understanding of this beacon of new Labour values.

● THE environmental group Manchester Wildlife has asked Manchester council to return an award presented to it in recognition of its commitment in 1991 to give up the use of moss peat in council gardens and floral displays. (The use of peat is condemned by greens because its extraction destroys increasingly rare wetlands and the plants and animals that live on them). Manchester Wildlife wants its gong back because a member inquired of the city council what was the secret of the magnificent hanging baskets and planters at the centre of this year's "Manchester in Bloom" initiative. The reply: liberal use of peat compost!



THE TERMINATORS

HACKNEY'S budget gap has leapt from £40m to an estimated £76.4m, reveals a report leaked to the *Eye*. The report for the imploding council's policy and finance committee lays much of the blame at the door of "service provider" Itnet, which is expected to collect only 65 percent of council tax this year, compared to an original estimate of 96 percent — equivalent to a shortfall of £19.1m. Itnet has also managed to *increase* the backlog of housing benefit cases, *increase* the amount of unrecovered debt owing to the council and collect only one third of the council's debt that the previous supposedly useless public servants had managed.

Councillors recently agreed to "terminate" housing benefit and council tax contracts with Itnet. But that decision will in fact only add to Hackney's financial woes. Yet another private report commissioned by Hackney to look at the revenue and benefits service has concluded that "termination is not a practical or sensible option", and that "if Itnet depart... the council would be left with the nearly insuperable problem of running the services with reduced resources and considerable specialist skill gaps".

A closer examination of the "sacking" reveals that the council has merely served notice on Itnet of its intention to terminate the 10-year contract. The small print ensures that the earliest possible date this can happen is June 2001. Hackney officers instructed to see whether another local authority or private firm might be daft enough to take on the job have drawn a blank. It looks as though any parting of the ways between Hackney and Itnet will not occur until the matter has been settled in a court of law... doubtless adding further to Hackney's financial crisis.

Meanwhile Itnet has snapped up a new IT contract from the council at Cambridge. Perhaps this will help its slumping share price.

ALL WIGHT FOR SOME

A SPLENDID example of how the privatisation of care for the elderly benefits all sorts of people except the elderly emerges from Somerset and the Isle of Wight.

The Redstone Trust and Somerset Care Trust have run residential care homes for the aged in Somerset since privatisation of the service in the early 1990s. But a damning charity commission report has condemned the way trustees Peter Day and Julie Mortiboys and solicitor Martin Thornton made unauthorised payments to themselves of more than £400,000 over five years. Day and Naughtiboys, both employees of Somerset social services before privatisation, owe the trusts £375,000, according to the report. Thornton has repaid £34,000. All have resigned.

While these shenanigans were building up undetected in the mid-90s, on the Isle of Wight the privatised elderly care service Islecare was running into financial trouble. It was flogged off by county treasurer John Pulsford to none other than Somerset Care in a "competitive" process which found no need for tendering from anyone else. Now IoW council is half-way through a six-year contract which has proved such a good deal for Somerset Care that it now has reserves of £15m. The charity commission says this is against the rules for charity funds, which require "profits" to be disbursed for the benefit of those for whom the charity was set up — in this case, needy old folk.

Fact 1: This year's budget shortfall for the IoW council's social services department is £600,000 and rising.

Fact 2: IoW county treasurer John Pulsford and former Somerset Care trustee Peter Day have been chums since their schooldays.

High Principals

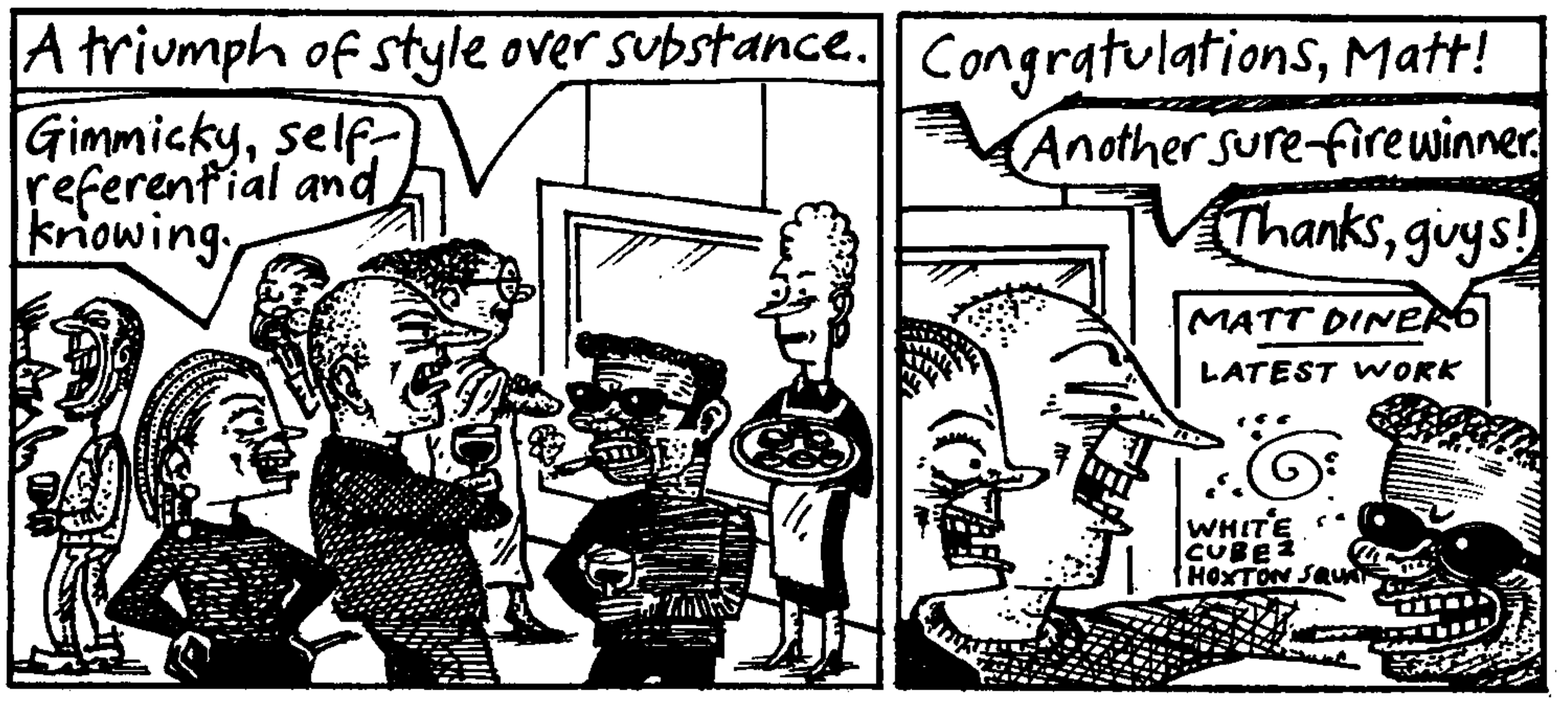
THE affairs of Barnsley College have taken a swift downturn since principal David Eade (see *Eyes passim*) went off on sick leave last year.

Staff fear for their jobs after the further education funding council (FEFC) announced a £5.5m cut in the college budget, following the closure of an extremely lucrative distance-learning franchise operation run by a company linked to the college, Progress Training Limited.

Readers may recall that Progress Training was the company which generously gave a £21,000 loan to a surfing magazine run by Eade's former step-children. Eade was one of two principal shareholders in Progress, along with Barnsley College Holdings which has also gone into liquidation.

The first intimation of financial problems at the college came when the college bar closed down, almost 20 people lost their jobs and the company that owned the bar, Focus Trading, went into liquidation several weeks ago. Students who were furious that the college had failed to save the bar might be interested to know that the two main shareholders in Focus Trading were, er, Eade and Barnsley College Holdings.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS — BY BIRCH



Number crunching

8 weeks of conflict

80 Palestinian children killed

$800m in US aid requested by Israel

Letters

Re-Morse

Sir,

I am appalled that Oxford's John Radcliffe hospital cardiac unit has now let Inspector Morse down. How many more have to die before this unit is brought to account for it's shameful record?

Yours faithfully,
(INSPECTOR) LEWIS,

Via e-mail.

Road rage

Sir,

Re: road crash in Yorkshire 11 November. Given your coverage of the Hatfield rail crash, can we now expect a "road watch" three-page special covering the death of six people in an accident in Yorkshire on Saturday? I would hope to find an extensive report of the road surface, the life history of all the deceased, calls for roads to be privatised and car makers to be nationalised, a complete ban on Sainsbury's lorries and condemnation of the police for allowing cars to be on the road in the first place.

Or do your reports really have more to do with politics than people's lives and deaths?

Have a nice week,

NICK THOMPSON,

Cambridge.

Right jab?

Sir,

I agree with Roger Fisken that there is no authenticated research which links the MMR jab to "autistic spectrum" disorders, as they should be known but, from my own experience, this amounts to a hole in the medical knowledge, rather than a vindication of the vaccine. Through a fluke of geography, at 18 months old, my son was referred to Dr Chakrabahti at the Stafford Child Development Centre, a leading light in the diagnosis of such disorders. He diagnosed my son as having Pervasive Development Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD NOS). He has discovered a sharp increase in the incidence of such disorders and his team encouraged us to start a parents support group. Having met a large number of parents, I am staggered by the similarities in the onset of the disorders within their offspring. It is irrelevant at what age the child is vaccinated but generally 2-4 weeks after the MMR jab, they lose attention, avoid eye contact and become insular. My son lost the 10 words of speech and the "normal" development he had pre-MMR. This pattern is reflected elsewhere. Given the recent explosion in the number of cases being diagnosed and the fact that the MMR jab has been introduced during this time, it appears to me (circumstantially at least) that the two are linked. Consequently, I have refused to let my younger daughter have the vaccine (in spite of a home visit from the county immunologist imploring me to) and I urge all other parents to do the same – this would force action from the top. Something has to be done.

NEIL ALLEN,

Via e-mail.

Hyde and seek

Sir,

HP Sauce (Eye 1015) was part right – Tom Pendry has not yet announced whether or not he is to retire as MP for Stalybridge and Hyde at the next election. But what he has said, many times, is that if he does decide to step down he will give his constituency plenty of time to hold the selection for his successor. So no "favours" for anyone and no story.

STEVE LADYMAN MP,

MP for South Thanet.

Eye contact

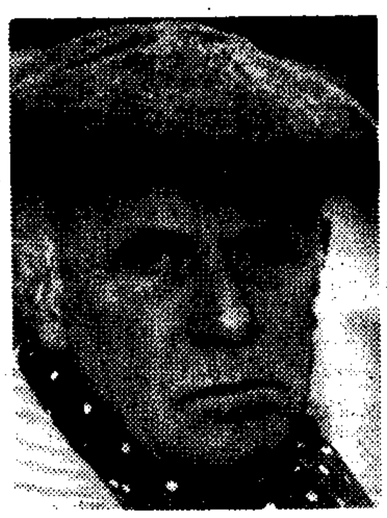
Sir,

Last December I paid a year's subscription to Private Eye for it to be sent to John Prescott at the House of Commons. As a labour sponsor I thought it might help John to really know what a lot of extra scandals were happening. Not receiving a reply, I wrote again asking if John got a chance to read his Private Eye. This must have started panic stations, because I then got a letter from one of John's minions containing a cheque for £20 saying that John was not allowed to accept such gifts. Now I still don't know if John reads his Private Eye.

EDWIN M. RIMMER,

Thornton Cleveleys, Lancs.

Lookalike



Glenconner

Meldrew

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the amazing resemblance between the bad-tempered pensioner Lord Glenconner and the archetypal English gentleman Victor Meldrew?

Are they by any chance related?

Yours,
SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCHPOTATO

London N6.

Fan male

Sir,

Congratulations to the producers of The Weakest Link for finding a format that makes Anne Robinson come across as so much nicer than she is in real life.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN BASSETT,

London NW3.

"I've sold the exclusive rights to Van Eyck"

Sweet sense

Sir,

Even Newer Muckspreader appears to have been struck by amnesia. As recently as your 6 October issue he was praising the New Zealand agricultural system because it has no subsidies, yet in the 3 November Eye he was decrying the European commission's proposal to raise the quota of sugar produced by developing countries allowed to be sold in the European union. He claimed that these "cheap imports" would lead to British sugar beet farmers suffering the same dire fate as other British farmers.

Since when is a quota anything other than a form of subsidy, which Muckspreader has routinely denounced? Does he realize that if it was not for quota barriers, not a single sugar beet would be grown in First World countries because compared to cane it is a hopelessly inefficient way of producing sugar? Does he realize that for years the European union, by paying its farmers to grow more sugar than Europe could consume and dumping the excess on world markets, has been depressing the price for hard-pressed Third World producers? Indeed, sugar is just another example of how the rich countries routinely over-produce agricultural products and then dump them on developing countries, undermining their attempts to develop a prosperous farming sector.

A more intelligent use of subsidies, and one that would not undermine poor countries' attempts to support themselves, would be to help those East Anglian sugar farmers to convert to organic farming, because at present 70 percent of the organic food eaten in the UK is imported.

Yours faithfully,
JENNIFER SWIFT,

Oxford.

SUPERMODERNS

KERBER

LIAM GALLAGHER AND NICOLE FROM ALL SAINTS TO HAVE BABY...
IS HE KICKING YET?
NO IT'S FAR TOO EARLY
POP WORLD
....HE NEEDS A FEW MORE PINTS.....
...HE MIGHT PUNCH YOU THOUGH!
F**K!
POP WORLD

O·B·N·K

"There's such a global awareness force about her. She [Liz Hurley] has this juxtaposition of her screen personality and is then this silent, thoughtful person who does needlepoint in between takes. She's a sweetheart."

GRAPEVINE, Now Magazine

Nominated by Elena Rennie.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

I-SPY *Vienna*

Submitted by Jasper Winn. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

God's word

Sir,
Alas for the exegetical expertise of your correspondent, Evan "Not A Jew" Smith.

On the principle that there is no redundancy in holy writings (God not wasting words) the passage Zechariah 8:7 "I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and righteousness" should be understood to mean no more – and no less – than that so long as the people are righteous, God will be with them, but when not, not.

This is not an unusual message in the Jewish scriptures.

Yours in the spirit,
VICTOR SEEDMAN,

Via e-mail.

Biblical proportions

Sir,

Evan Smith has not told the whole story (Letters, 17 November). The Old Testament of the Bible does indeed refer to the Temple Mount being in Israel. It also states that the Kingdom of Israel stretched as far as the River Euphrates. So, if the Old Testament is taken as a reliable guide to what current Middle Eastern borders should be, two and a half millennia later (as Evan Smith implies), Israel would have to annex all of Lebanon and most of Syria as well. Alternatively you could look at the actual merits of the case.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN MORGAN,

Via e-mail.

More Baraking

Sir,

Evan Smith's criticism (Letters, 17 Nov.) of your "Book of Barak" misses the point. Sharon's visit to the Dome of the Rock (the remains of the Jewish Temple may or may not be buried some metres underneath) was mainly intended for internal Israeli politics. It predictably produced a strong reaction from the Arab-ites etc. The same sort of effect might be expected if Ian Paisley and his Orange-ites visited the RC Cathedral in Armargh and claimed ownership thereof.

CHARLES "NOT EVEN A MOSLEM" HUGHES,

Felixstowe, Suffolk.

Voter of confidence

Sir,

You may think staff are cynical about the actions of Liberal Democrats in Islington, but us voters are bloody delighted.

I think selling off property for over £3.5m and reinvesting the proceeds in improving housing is a pretty good deal. The financial acumen of the borough's Labour predecessors was such that the rental income of these properties was less than £2,000 per annum – a yield of 0.05% per annum.

If any Islington Labour party member would be prepared to give me a loan at that interest rate I would be only too happy to oblige.

Yours faithfully,
ARNIE GIBBONS,

London N1.

"I'm dreaming of a white Christmas"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"My former wife is now living with a woman of the same sex."
CALLER, Radio 4
(G. Canning)

"This is the final act in the never-ending drama."
EMMA HERD, Sky News
(Tom Martyn)

"Well, Clive, it's all about the two Ms, movement and positioning."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(J. Jeffries)

"I think Lewis will stop Tua somewhere between the ninth and tenth rounds."
AUDLEY HARRISON, Radio 5 Live
(Bryn Williams)

"At the age of only 19, Frederick Chopin gave his first live concert." (Think about it. Ed.)
Classic FM Radio
(Sam Evans)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Gibraltar**
from Our Own Correspondent

WHEN the row first began to unfold last year, it appeared little more than an unseemly domestic between two of our top officials. Then HMS Tireless, your faulty nuclear submarine, stranded itself off the Rock and the argument between our chief minister and chief justice took on an international dimension.

We are now beginning to question how far the mandarins in London are moving behind the scenes to back Peter Caruana's government in a desperate bid to persuade him to continue to support the UK's controversial plans for the beleaguered vessel.

Relations between our leader and our chief justice Derek Schofield took a nose dive at the opening of the last legal year in October 1999, when Schofield used his state of the union address to air his concerns about government interference in the judiciary. Caruana's people issued a press release stating that the chief justice had gone "beyond the boundaries of proper judicial comment and behaviour", in effect calling for his resignation.

In May our top beak once again found himself at the centre of a controversy, this time over his alleged failure to make the proper social security and income tax payments for a former maid. Responsibility for resolving the matter lay with the new, London-appointed governor, David Durie, who had to decide whether to order a tribunal to investigate the chief justice. The governor's office remained silent on the subject from May to October. It was strongly rumoured that your chaps in Whitehall had intervened, terrified that clearing Schofield's name would aggravate Caruana whose support over HMS Tireless the UK desperately needs.

Even the pro-government newspaper *Vox* published an article, stating: "This inexplicable delay in any information on the matter being released in public raises hard to resist serious suspicions that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London is being involved in this purely internal matter. It is nothing short of grotesque that the principal judicial office bearer in Gibraltar should be treated so shabbily and held under the sword of Damocles for so long."

Schofield was soon in trouble again. Following a routine police check in July, he received a written caution for driving without a valid MOT or road tax, even though he was stopped during a period of grace following the introduction of a new road tax system. He could still face prosecution over the incident.

On 4 October, just before the new legal year, the governor finally made his statement on the allegations against Schofield. He announced that he would be taking no formal action, adding that: "It is regrettable that matters were not regularised at an earlier stage, but I have accepted that the Chief Justice did not deliberately seek to avoid his obligations".

The following week Caruana stepped into the fray publicly for the first time by issuing details to the press of the employment records of two former maids to the Schofields. The government changed the tax laws the day before this announcement, allowing the income tax department to pass previously confidential information to other departments for the first time. The governor had not given his assent to this change in legislation when the maids' tax details were released, however, posing the question of whether Caruana's briefing in itself constitutes a breach of income tax laws.

The allegations concerning the maids and the motoring incident may of course be completely unrelated to the speech Schofield made criticising the government. His wife Anne Schofield does not believe this, however, and in July she told another of our newspapers, *Panorama*, that there was a campaign to hound her husband from office. *Panorama* also reported that the Schofields asked the Royal Gibraltar Police to investigate whether their telephones were being tapped in October 1999 and again in May.

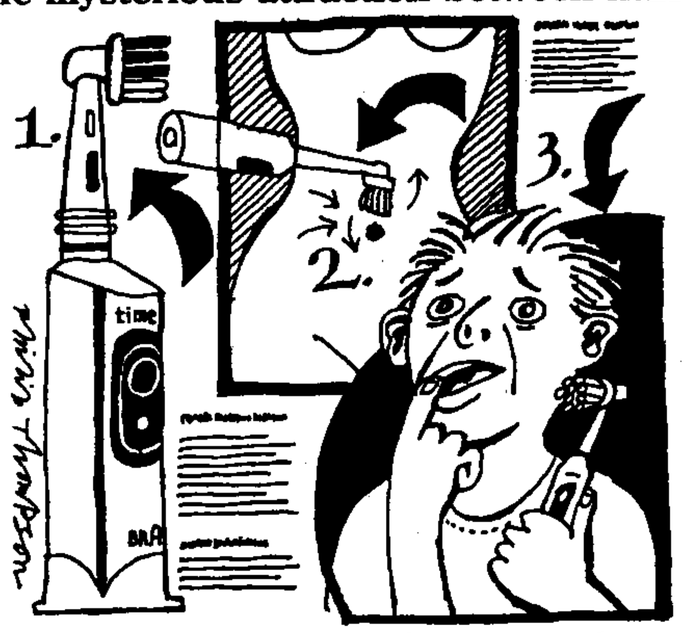
Furthermore, on 18 July when the chief justice was on holiday with his wife and children, CCTV footage from a security camera fitted at their home revealed that four unidentified men visited the property. Anne Schofield's suspicions of a "dirty tricks campaign" are remarkably familiar. In August 1999 your own *Sunday Times* published the claims of a professional burglar who said that five years earlier he had been paid to bug the home telephone of the then attorney-general of Gibraltar, John Blackburn-Gittings, on behalf of British intelligence.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "The response to our request has been amazing," Dr Karl Kruszelnicki told listeners to the Dr Karl show on the Triple J radio network in New South Wales. "Over 1,500 people have already logged onto our website, and their data is bringing us closer each day to a better understanding of the lint-bearing proclivities of the human navel."

Dr Kruszelnicki, the Julius Sumner Miller Fellow at the University of Sydney, is currently running the largest-ever scientific investigation into the mysterious attraction between fluff



and navels. "We are trying to work out what causes the lint, and why it is always blue. We think it is mainly fibres coming off clothing, but why does it end up in the belly button? It looks likely that it is the hairs on your belly and groin that pass the fibres along until they finally arrive in the navel. One brave listener actually shaved his belly button, and his collection of lint promptly dropped to zero. But when the hair began to grow back, the lint returned. The most disturbing report we've had was from a woman who wanted to bare her midriff in public, so she cleaned her navel first. She washed it, then scrubbed it using her brother's electric toothbrush, and guess what? Her brother got a fungal infection in his mouth." *(The Australian [supplement – The Age], 10/00. Spotter: Michael Travers)*

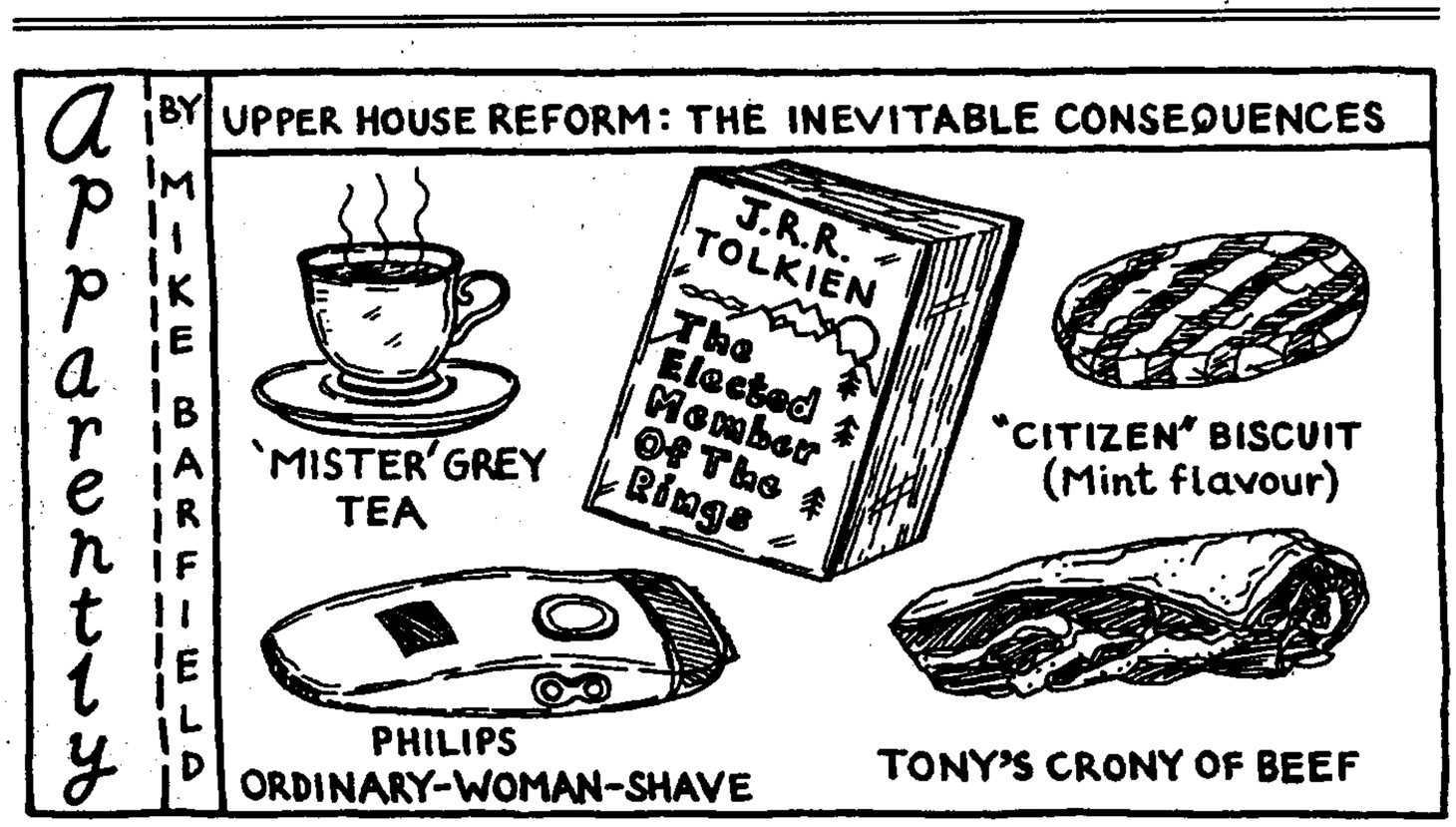
● "This is no joke," declared Mayor Keith Holliday after a city council meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina had ended in chaos. "I was just trying to think outside the box. And if cryogenic freezing was good enough for Walt Disney, then it's certainly good enough for some bunch of murderers on Death Row."

Mayor Holliday had proposed his radical solution during a council debate about the problems of overcrowding in the city's penitentiary. "At present, Death Row inmates can appeal against execution for year after year, claiming wrongful conviction and judicial irregularities. That delay causes overcrowding, and costs us millions in legal fees and prison fees, before we can finally execute them. So instead of wasting all that money, why don't we put them all on ice? We could cryogenically freeze them, then reverse the process if later evidence clears them of their crimes. If it doesn't, then they just stay frozen. I watched a television talk show about it last night, and we have the technology. All we need now is Jesus the Lord, fine corn liquor, and the courage to think the unthinkable." *(The Roanoke Times, 7/10/00. Spotter: anon.)*

—●—

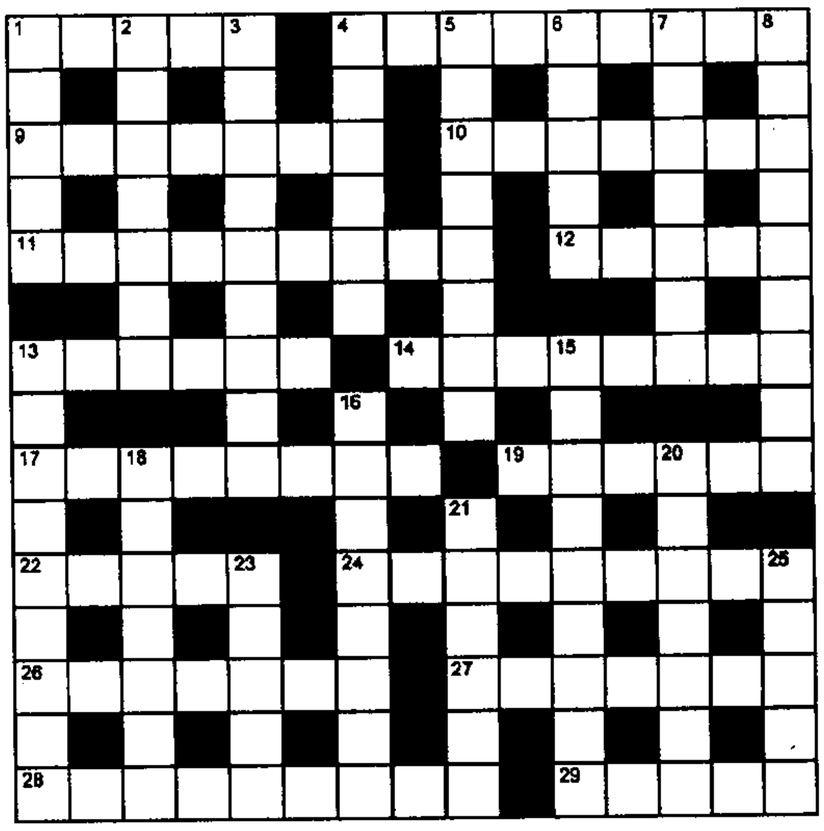
● *"Our company is appalled by these unauthorised advertisements," a spokesman for Nextel Communications told a court in Manila, "and we are horrified by their publication. The advertising material and sales literature contains deeply insulting and obnoxious matter which clearly offends the sensibilities of the Jewish people, and that is why we are urgently seeking an injunction and damages."*

Nextel Communications was suing Syntech Systems (its local distributor in Manila) over a series of advertisements which Syntech had placed in the Philippine national press, and which had led to public protests from the Israeli Embassy. "One newspaper advert, which has appeared several times, is captioned 'The Final Solution.' It features a photograph of an Adolf Hitler lookalike using a Nextel phone and extolling its virtues. He speaks of 'my struggle' to find a mobile phone system 'that will last for a thousand years,' and will promise its customers 'the extermination of dues.' This association of our products with genocide and anti-Semitism is disgusting and has caused inestimable and irreparable injury to Nextel's business reputation and goodwill in the Philippines, and we shall be seeking exemplary damages." (South China Morning Post, 9/10/00. Spotter: Tim Phillip)



EYE CROSSWORD 171

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Setback for American number two - no time for foreign food (5)
4 Member's no longer to do what members are supposed to do (9)
9 Underwear's being worn with centre point for beardie (7)
10 Marx's great unending love that hurt inside (7)
11 A tight pain in the arse unwelcome in public (5,4)
12 Softish, but would-be macho ex-leader? (5)
13 Congress coming from behind as party gets extremely matey (6)
14 Ivory connected to this trafficker? (8)
17 Crappy beer given to the underprivileged (8)
19 Patsy's famous rub endlessly administered to Henman (6)
22 Hunter performing outside the city (5)
24 One whom it pays to contain the beast within? (9)
26 Inflamed Brenda cosied up to gangster, just as it was written (7)
27 A division of members one may not change (7)
28 Cultural area of a knob's thus excited (5,4)
29 Stimulant needed by retarded pop group member for communication! (5)

DOWN

1 Faulty-sounding fortune teller (5)
2 Tired gag about being in Slough (7)
3/23/4dn. The thing is, forbidding having an erection when having way with Jack is laughable to *Eye* readers (3,4,2,5,6)
4 (see 3)
5 Leave securer for ambitious type (2-6)
6 Bob mounts Hutch, the hack's delight (5)
7 It's a strain holding arse in the ideal place (7)
8 Interaction of a group naturally is awfully messy, etc. when love intervenes (9)
13 One with a gift for drama, ole Posh's breaking Becks' heart inside (9)
15 Outbreak of illegal activities gives wrong signal (5,4)
16 Pacino, Hurley act up after grand opening of film (8)
18 One collared by crap, uppity American getting the Japanese treatment (7)
20 Bill turns up after first class pot's brewed from starch (7)
21 Mowlam the warmonger's haircut (6)
23 (see 3)
25 Shag alternative flips Andy, for one (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 8.12.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.

Solution to Crossword No. 170

Winner: CHRIS JOHNSON

ACROSS: 1 Big Bang 5 Capable 9 Reams 10 Vestibule 11/12 Sleeping Beauty 14 Order 16 Ham-fisted 18 Marijuana 20 Error 22 Tobago 23 Amnesiac 26 Matricide 27 Bible 28 Senegal 29 Throw up.

DOWN: 1 Barnstorm 2 Go ahead 3 Aesop 4 Giving head 5 Cast 6 Prime time 7 Bouquet 8 Enemy 13 Embalmment 15 Rejigging 17 Dirt cheap 19 Rub it in 21 Rainbow 22 Times 24 Ember 25 Bill.

PRESCOTT STORM THREATENS WORLD CLIMATE

by Ecology Staff **Lunchtime O'Zone**

A FREAK storm blew up over the Hague yesterday and swept into Britain causing huge damage to everything in his wake.

At the centre of the tornado, which is threateniong to hit France, Germany and anyone else who disagrees with him, is the area of depression known as John Prescott.

Expert meteorologists say that the Prescott is just a big ball of gas that occasionally erupts blowing hot air into the atmosphere.

Hurricane Two Jags

Said one expert, "This one unfortunately shows no signs of moving away. It could spell chaos for road and rail users for years to come."

THE WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

EXCLUSIVE TO COK! MAGAZINE (PROP. DIRTY DES)

THE FAIRYTALE marriage took place yesterday at exotic Blackfriars Bridge of the world's most glamorous couple tied the knot in a glitzy ceremony attended by some of the top lawyers in the world.

Champagne corks popped and cameras clicked as famous sexaholic "Dirty Des" Desmond wed the gorgeous pouting young stunner, Rosie Boycott.

BUMS ON PAGES

Amongst those who wished the couple well were hundreds of desperate hacks terrified of losing their jobs.

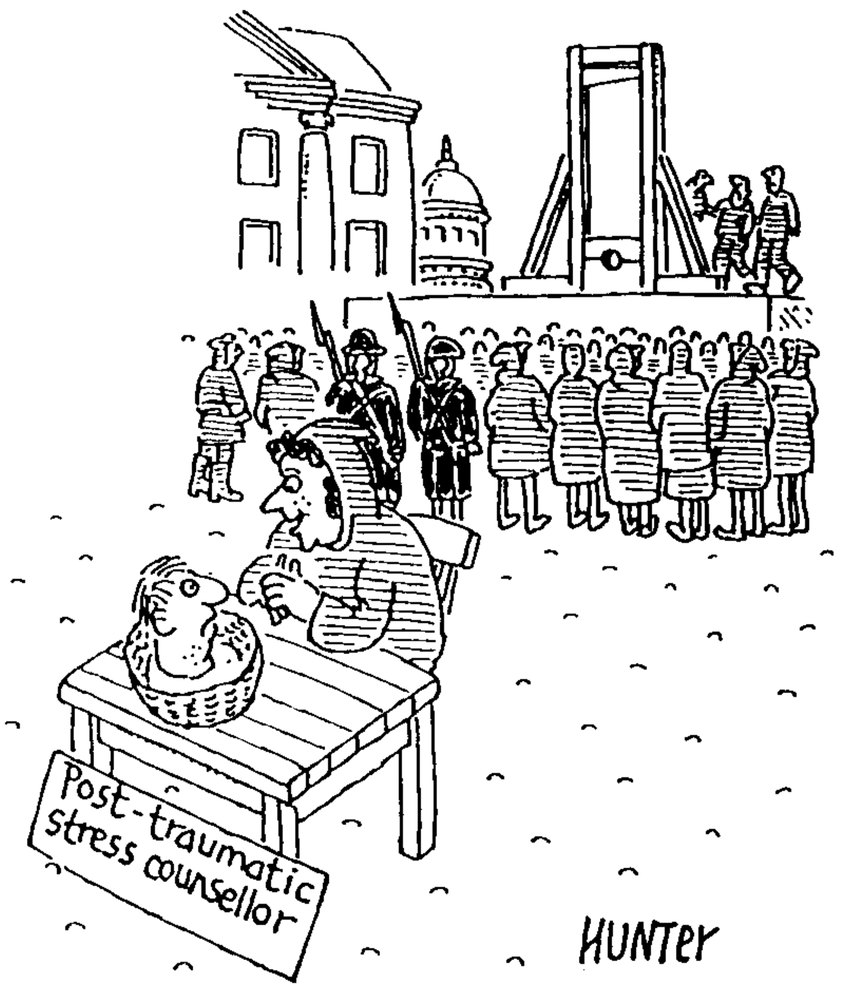
Said one onlooker, "They've got a lot in common. She wants to edit the paper. And so does he."

Said another, "Good luck to them. She's a lovely girl and I can't wait to see her with her kit off on the front page."

Stop Press

Divorce proceedings were filed five minutes ago by Miss Rosie Boycott against Mr "Dirty Des" Desmonde on the grounds of "irretrievable breakdown".

Said a tearful Ms Boycott, "I had to promise to obey Dirty Des, which was against everything I stand for. I am looking forward to an enormous settlement."



BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Eye contributors choose their favourite reading from titles published in the past twelve months.

E.J. THRIBB PETER Ackroyd's Neasden (TescoPress, 1780pp, £79.99) brings to life the extraordinary vibrant inner life of this famous borough, weaving together fact and folklore in a dazzling display of interleaved narrative. Founded by the Romans in 61AD, Nisdonium was the northernmost point of the Via Circulari. Through Ackroyd's colourful account we relive the dark and troubled history of Neasden through the ages.

SALLY JOCKSTRAP IT HAS been a bumper year for sports lovers. Top of the list is "100 Not Out" by David Beckham (Personality Press, 2pp, £17.99). But there have been plenty of others that have caught my eye. "Tiger Woods – All The Way To Wimbledon" (All England Books, 175pp, £9.99) and Frankie Dettori's "Second's Out – My Life In The Ring" (Sportstrash Publishing, 232pp, £25.99) were both masterpieces of their genre.

WILL SELFPARODY OVERLOOKED in the smug, self-congratulatory parochial turd fest that is the Book of the Year is a first novel, so far unpublished, by the young Innuit magic realist Igloo Iglooson, provisionally entitled "Banjo Dancer". I also enjoyed all my own books, unlike everyone else.

DAVE SPART THERE is frankly only one book that I have read this year which totally and utterly deconstructs the capitalist myths perpetrated by an outdated oligarchy. I am referring of course to Francis Wheen's monumental "Life of Paul Foot" (Spartacus Books, 678pp, £99.99)

HARRY POTTER I REALLY hated William Hague' s "Believing in Britain" (Central office Books, £1.99), in which the 14 year-old so-called "Boy Wizard" attempts to cast a spell over Britain. It was unconvincing, old-fashioned and derivative.

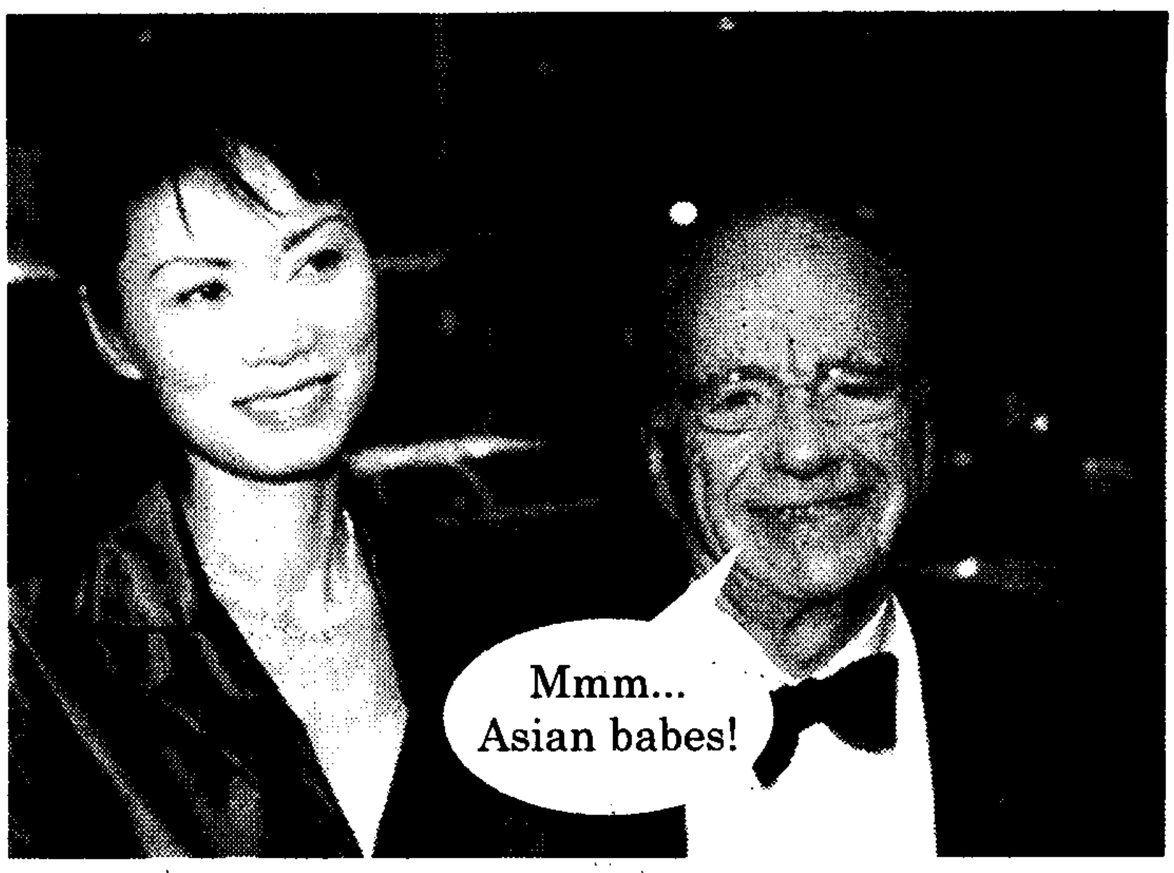
A TAXI DRIVER WRITES HONESTLY, guv, the best book by a long shot has got to be Alan Clark's Diaries. What a gentleman he was, even when he was chasing the ladies and supporting Hitler – still, nothing wrong with that. That'll be £98.50, guv – sorry I had to take the long way round because they closed the Albert Bridge.

PHIL SPACE THE BEATLES Anthology (Turd Books, 7,848pp, £257.99). For lovers of the Fab Four this has got to be essential reading. In their own words, the Beatles tell the extraordinary story of how they managed to cobble together yet another book out of the same old story.

MIKE GIGGLER SURELY for a light-hearted sideways look at life you can't beat Giles Coren's collected Times Diaries "Son of Cricklewood" (Robson, 98pp, £22.99).

TV'S ROWAN PULLING THE Marquis de Psude's Histoire de Flagellation dans le Monastère de Limoges (1355-1356) remains the favourite bedside reading of all true connoisseurs of literary erotophilia. *(That's enough books. Ed.)*

PORNOGRAPHER OWNS NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SHOCK!



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

The nights are drawing in, and soon we shall be celebrating Christmas. But I have to confess that, as of now, I am finding it rather difficult to summon up any seasonal goodwill!

The former incumbent of this parish, Archdeaconess Thatcher, who was of course our first and only lady vicar, has seen fit to make a totally uncalled-for and hurtful attack on the way I am running the parish.

Look, I frankly have better things to do with my time than to answer the criticisms of every bitter old lady who is no longer in the limelight and can't bear it!

Hey, as it says in the Good Book, "Life is too short" *(Book of Platitudes, Ch. 14, v. 3)* to bother about the small-minded carping of someone who no one pays any attention to.

Very few of you probably even noticed what my predecessor said, when she stood up in the middle of evensong, waving her handbag and shouting at me.

She called me "vain" and "weak" and accused me of "monumental folly".

Pretty rude, you'll agree, not to mention totally untrue. In fact, there are probably some of you who would agree that I have every right to seek legal redress under the new Human Rights Act, which guarantees the right of every individual not to be vilified by deranged elderly women, who have probably had too much to drink at lunchtime! (Thanks, Cherie, for the free legal advice on that one!)

So, let's draw a line in the sand under the whole unpleasant business of the Rev. Thatcher, shall we? As Our Lord himself said, "Forgive and forget" *(Book of Cliches, 5.3).*

But it's pretty difficult, isn't it, to forgive and forget, when it is someone whom you've really gone out of your way to be pleasant to; someone you've invited back to the vicarage to ask their advice; someone you've said nice things about in public; and then she turns round and makes these cruel and pointless remarks which, frankly, she should have kept her mouth shut about!

Goodness me, when I think of all the trouble we've been put to trying to sort out the mess she left of the parish after her eleven years in charge!

I don't want to go into it in detail, but let's just look at some of the things I am thinking of:

- no money spent on repairing church fabric for years on end
- selling off valuable church silver
- bringing in a private firm to run the flower roster
- introduced the ill-fated "sponsored pew

scheme", giving preferential seating arrangements to local businesses

- imposing charges for after-service coffee and biscuits, which had previously been provided free to all worshippers, regardless of creed, colour, gender orientation on socio-economic status.

Frankly, I could fill up the whole of this newsletter with examples of the disastrous mismanagement of the parish during the years 1979-1990.

But obviously I am not going to waste space on all that. It is time to move on! Time to look forward and to accept that it is a different world out there! And, let's be fair, not everything the Rev. Thatcher did was bad. For example, I am thinking in particular of the considerable improvement in church finances made possible by the pew scheme, the coffee levy, the new "public-private" flower roster arrangements, etc, etc.

But none of this excuses her recent conduct in describing me as "useless". What a pity she sold off our local mental hospital to become the St Albion's Business Park, otherwise she would have been a prime candidate to be locked up there forever! (No offence, Margaret!).

Anyway, that's quite enough about the Rev. Thatcher in a week when I've got many more important things to write about!

Yours, Tony

Millennium Tent Update

P-Y Gerbil writes:

Bonjour!
Et j'ai grandes nouvelles pour les "fans" de notre tente millenniaire!
Enfin, nous avons trouvés un punteur pour acheter cette edifice magnifique! Et qui est-il, ce penteur extraordinaire? C'est moi, P-Y Gerbil, qui sera la proprietaire de la tente! Quelle amazing turn-up pour le libre, n'est-ce-pas? Alors,oubliez-vous le dot.com park de technology! Et bienvenu la grande Tente de Gerbil! Rollez, rollez up pour un Absolument Amazing Jour!!!

Votre ami, P-Y Gerbil.

PS. Si vous avez des bonnes idées pour ma tente, ou l'argent pour l'acheter, donnez-moi un bell sur ma mobile (0777 330 338)!

To Remember In Your Prayers

● poor Dennis Thatcher who, for so many years, has had to put up with living with a woman suffering from delusions. Let us not judge him for taking refuge in the bottle. Which one of us would not have done, if we were married to her? Amen.

Notices

WOMEN'S GROUP

Why Women Aren't Being Given Their Share Of Top Jobs

Speaker, Mrs Margaret Jay (daughter of Rev. Callaghan), matron of the St Albion's Sunrise Old Folkds Home, chair of the Parish Women's Committee, assistant convenor of the PCC steering group, adviser to the vicar on local media issues, co-chair Parish Family Outreach Action Group, etc, etc.

IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION

The Vicar's wife would like to make clear that when she attended the Diwali celebrations organised by the local Hindu community, it is simply untrue and highly defamatory to suggest that she was given a costly sari by Mr & Mr Hinduja – two local brothers with a fine reputation for supplying alms. It is true that Cherie wore the sari on a few occasions, but she subsequently donated it to the Parish bring-and-buy sale when people started to gossip, and it will now be used for the shepherds' robes in this year's Nativity Play. Well done, Cherie!

Parish Postbag...

Dear Vicar

You stupid, fokking fokker! What sort of eedjit do you think you

Yours sincerely
R. Geldof
Proprietor, Sparklers R Us,
the High Street

The Editor reserves the right to cut letters on grounds of obscenity. A.C.

NEW YEAR FIREWORKS

■ There will be no fireworks display in the parish this year. Unfortunately, Mr Livingstone and his friend Mr Geldof, did not think things through properly, so Mr Prescott has quite rightly refused to allow them to use the field behind the Working Men's Club (or anywhere else for that matter!) for reasons of health and safety. Sorry, Ken, but honestly it was a very stupid idea! T.B.

On sale now – SON OF BLAIR – THE SEQUEL £4.99

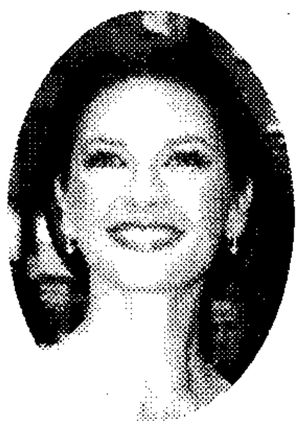
QUITE FAMOUS WOMAN MARRIES REALLY FAMOUS MAN

A woman who is quite famous was yesterday married to a really famous man.

Said a wedding guest, "They're almost the perfect match – what with him being really famous, and her being not-quite-so-famous.

On other pages

Pub Which Doesn't Really Exist Faces Fictional Axe 7



How They Are Related

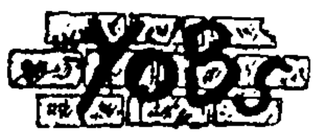
Catherine Zeta Jones

Alpha Jones
|
Beta Jones
|
Gamma Jones
|
Jones, the Baker
|
Jones, the Steam
|
Jones, the Tom
|
Jones, the Zeta
|
Jones, the Marry A Rich American Film Star

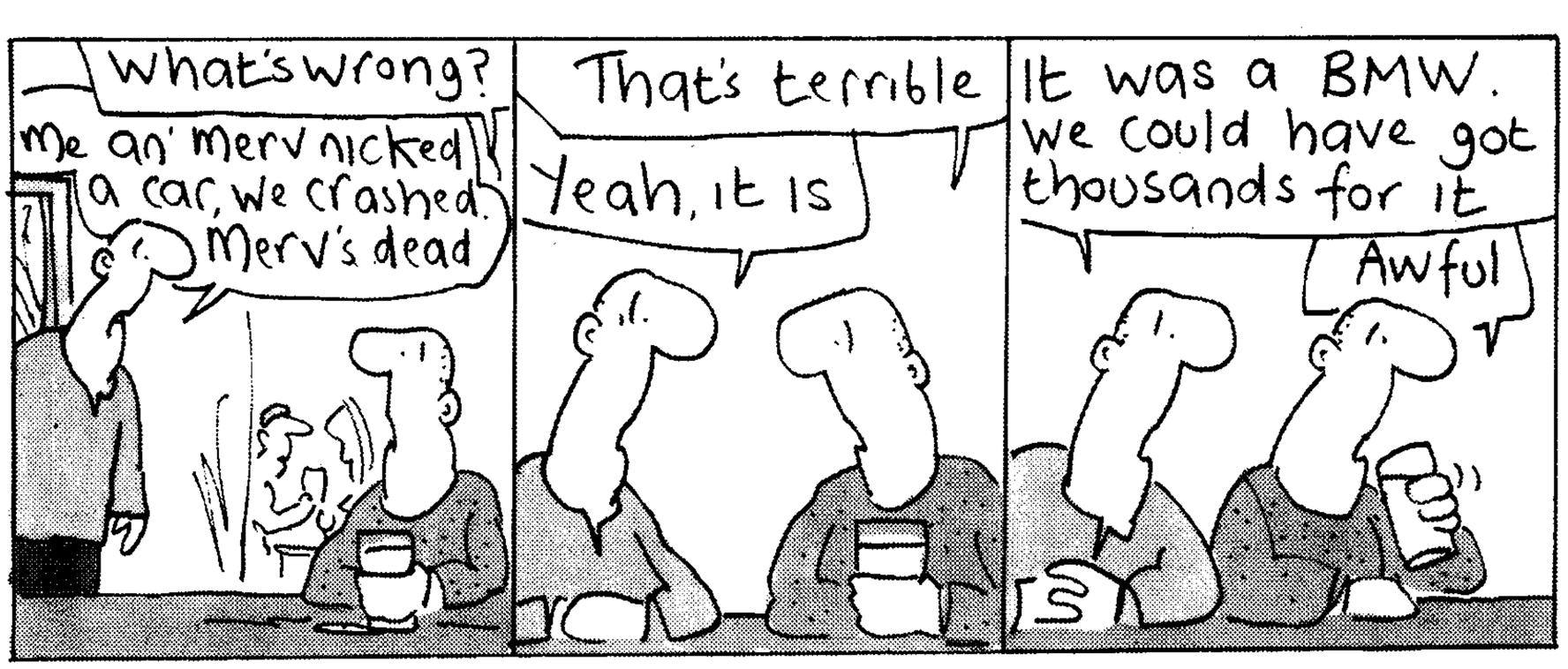
Michael Douglas

Spartacus
|
Van Gogh
|
Captain James T. Kirk
|
General Douglas McArthur
|
Kirk Douglas
|
Douglas DC-10
|
Douglas, Isle of Man
|
Michael Douglas

COMPLETE CHARLIE'S ANGELS



HUSBAND


What's wrong?
Me an' Merv nicked a car, we crashed. Merv's dead
That's terrible
Yeah, it is
It was a BMW. We could have got thousands for it
Awful

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the Death of Victor Meldrew and the Retirement of Billy Graham

So. Farewell
Then Victor
Meldrew
And Billy
Graham.

TV Evangelist
And TV
Curmudgeon.

"I don't believe
It!"
That was Meldrew's
Catchphrase.

"I do believe
It!"
That was
Billy's.

Endeavour J. Thribb (17½)

101 Things You Can Mistake For A Paedophile

No. 7. Paedo-strian Crossing

(That's enough of this series. Ed.)

Eleanor of Aquitaine

Those 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?' Questions In Full

These are the 10 questions that Mrs Judith Keppel answered on her way to becoming TV's first toff millionaire.

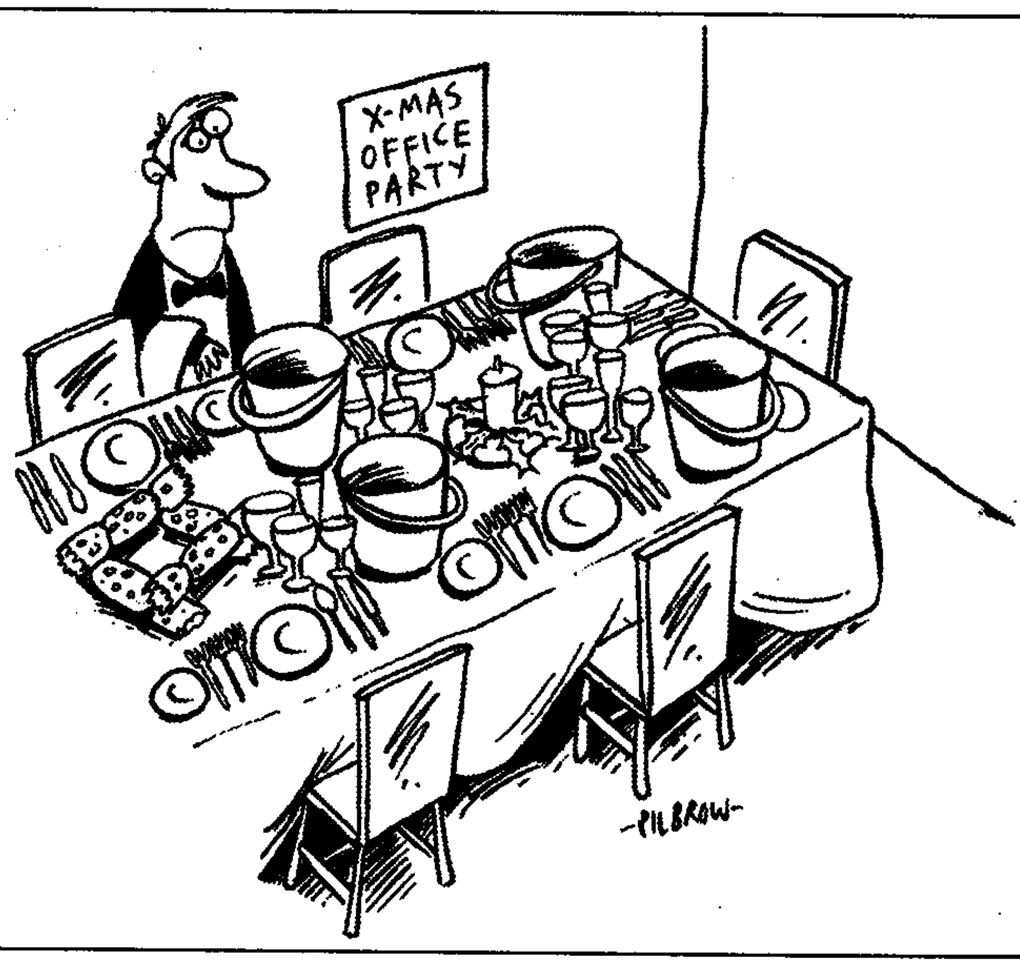
1. Of which city is Fulham a district?
A. Paris **B.** New York **C.** Helsinki **D.** London

2. Who is Prince Charles's mistress?
A. Julie Burchill **B.** Denise van Outen **C.** Anne Robinson D. Your cousin.

3. Is Peter Jones
A. A Welsh singer **B.** An Arsenal footballer **C.** A character in Emmerdale **D.** A place where you do your shopping.

4. Which popular BBC character is on the other channel at this moment?
A. Captain Mainwaring **B.** Tony Hancock **C.** Victor Meldrew **D.** Basil Fawlty.

5. When you win a million pounds would you like to take a holiday in
A. Torremolinos **B.** Butlins **C.** Provence **D.** Benidorm.



RAIL PASSENGER TO RECEIVE COMPENSATION

by Our Rail Staff **Kay Oss**

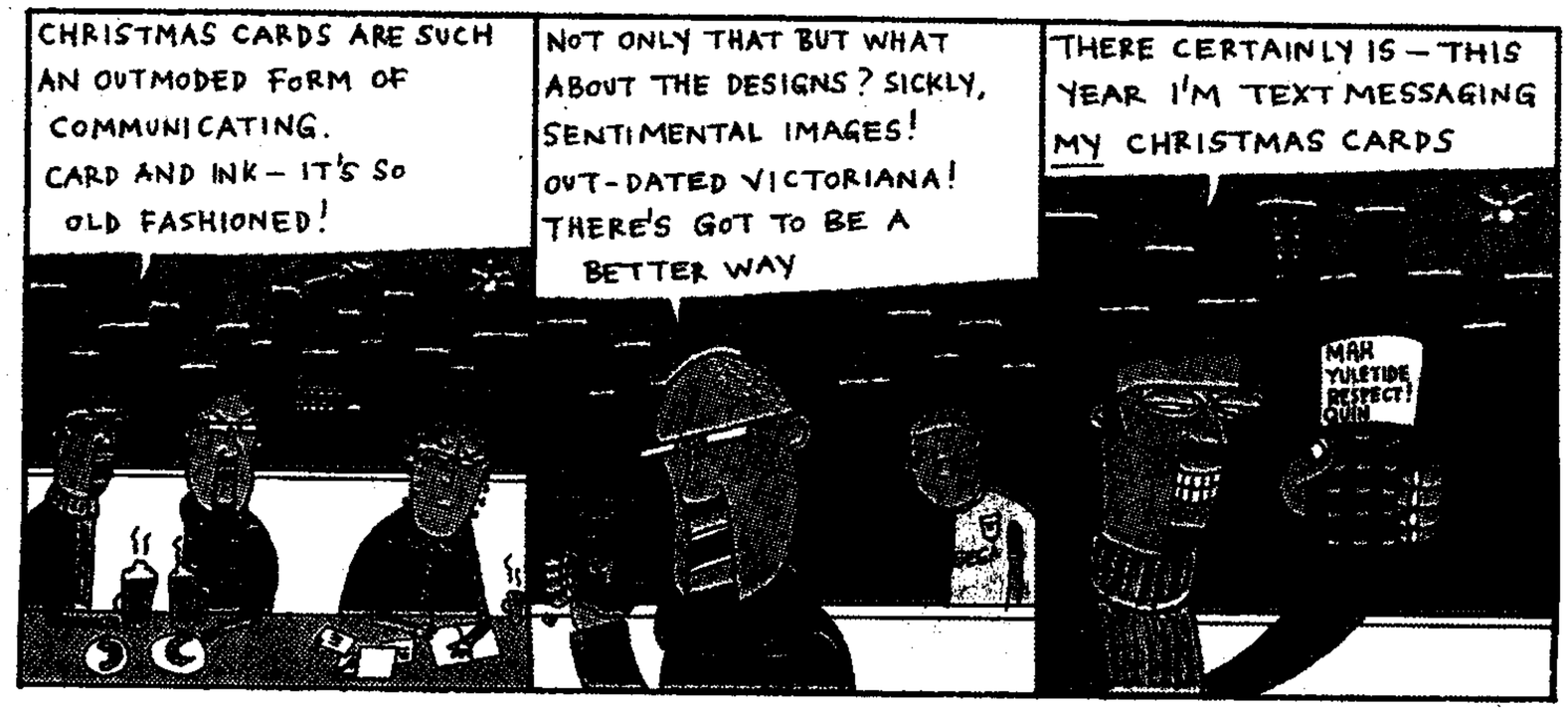
IT was yesterday revealed that the compensation programme for those worst hit by recent rail chaos has begun, with Railtrack handing over a sum of £400,000 to their biggest passenger, a Mr Gerald Corbett.

A spokesman for Mr Corbett said, "To qualify for his pay-out, Mr Corbett was required to sign a piece of paper saying, 'I'm rubbish, I quit.' As a consequence, Railtrack were more than happy to reimburse Mr Corbett with a generous sum of other people's money – which is roughly the equivalent to his yearly season ticket to The Seychelles, via the Gatwick Express."

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON – AT XMAS

KNIFE & PACKER

JUST LOOK AT OUR TREE! WHO SAYS YOU HAVE TO DESTROY THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE NAME OF CHRISTMAS?
IT'LL BRING PLEASURE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME WITHOUT DEPLETING THE PLANET
YES, AFTER ALL, A BONSAI TREE IS FOR LIFE NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS


CHRISTMAS CARDS ARE SUCH AN OUTMODED FORM OF COMMUNICATING. CARD AND INK – IT'S SO OLD FASHIONED!
NOT ONLY THAT BUT WHAT ABOUT THE DESIGNS? SICKLY, SENTIMENTAL IMAGES! OUT-DATED VICTORIANA! THERE'S GOT TO BE A BETTER WAY
THERE CERTAINLY IS – THIS YEAR I'M TEXT MESSAGING MY CHRISTMAS CARDS
MAH YULETIDE RESPECT! QUID

LATE NEWS

LEADING internet companies today welcomed news that the Millennium Dome in Greenwich is to be transformed into an e-commerce business park.

"E-businesses tend to completely over-exaggerate the number of users that will be attracted to their site, run up staggering losses forcing them to go cap in hand to their investors for more cash within a few months of being set up, then go bankrupt at the drop of a hat," said one e-businessman.

"We couldn't think of a more perfect venue to be located in." *(Rotters)*

EVEN LATER NEWS

FLAMBOYANT camp superstar squandered £760 million in two years – "I like Domes," says Peter Mandelson. *(Rotters)*

Weather forecasters predicted more misery for homeowners as Tony Blair travelled to see the areas worst affected

The Times

Pick of the Day
by Edna Pottersman

The Queen's Nose (BBC1, 4.35 pm)

Daily Telegraph

DAILY SEXPRESS
Friday December 1, 2000

PORN BARON SCREWS RIVALS OVER BEAVER PAPERS!

by SARAH SHANNON
Media Correspondent

RICHARD "Big Dick" Desmond has forked out £125 million to add the Soaraway Daily Sexpress and its sizzling sister Sunday to his bulging porn to porn media empire.

Says Dirty Desmond, "Blimey! I've scored here! What a couple of beauties I've got! I'm just the man to get it up – the circulation, I mean!"

Are You Getting It Daily?

Raunchie Rosie – Is she good for the sack? **3** **Rupert Bare** - The naughty naked cartoon hero has some adult fun at the nude Teddy Bears' Picnic! **5** **Your saucy stars tonight** Virgo in Uranus with Jonathan Caner **7** Readers' Wives' Letters 9 **Whither the Euro** by political editor Anthony Bevins *(You're fired. R.D.)* **Has Britain gone to the dogs?** by Peter Hitchens *(You're fired as well. R.D.)*

ROY of the RUGGERS
WE WANT TO BE MORE LIKE FOOTBALLERS
WE WANT A DECENT WAGE FOR TURNING UP...
...AND PLAYING A REALLY BORING GAME
SWING HIGH SWEET FEES
ROOPER

'THE EURO-ARMY IS NOT A EURO-ARMY' Says Blair

by Our Political Staff
Yuri Phile

A FURIOUS Prime Minister last night lashed out at reports that Britain was signing up to an integrated European army.

"It is outrageous," said Mr Blair, "that these right-wing Europhobic journalists like Lord Owen, Lord Healey and Lord Carrington should go round spreading these hysterical lies about our purely pragmatic decision to create an integrated European army."

Hot Blair

"Nothing could be more unpatriotic," he continued, "than to oppose the armed wing of the single European currency, which is all that is on the table.

"And besides," Mr Blair concluded, "the not-the-European army would only be used in humanitarian emergencies, like the day when it becomes necessary for Europe to declare war on the United States of America.

"It is high time," screamed Mr Blair, his voice rising several octaves in his excitement, "that we Europeans demonstrate that we are a super-power capable of taking on anyone in the world – so long as the Americans give us the equipment."

That Non-European Army – How It Will Work

1. The RAF will in future be known as the Luftwaffe.
2. The Ark Royal will be renamed the Tirpitz.
3. The role of General Sir Peter de la Billiere will be played by Max von Sydow.
4. The 17/21st Kings Own Lancers will merge with the Danish Peace Corps, to become the European Housing Agency.
5. The England football team will be commanded by Field-Marshal Sven-Göran Eriksson.
6. The Imperial War Museum is to be renamed the Metric War Museum in accordance with EC Directive 80/181.
7. Regimental mascot for the European Rapid Reaction Force will be the snail.
8. The new motto for the British Army will be "For EU, Tommy, the war is over."
9. ...er...
10. ...that's it.

NEW EUROPEAN ARMY – HOW IT WILL LOOK

GLENDA SLAGG

Fleet Street's Anne Robinson

ANNE ROBINSON – aren'tcha-sickofher with her granny glasses, crooked mouth and 'orrible red hair!?!?! Who do you think your are??? Torquemada??!?! More like Torquerubbish!?!?! Who's the weakest link?? You are, you old bag!!!!?? No offence, Annie!!??!

ANNE ROBINSON – hats off to Annie Robinson!!?! The BBC's brilliant answer to Chris Tarrant!! Isn't it just great to see a middle-aged hackette suddenly become famous and get given a whole load of money!?!?! Are you listenin', Mr TV Producer??!?! I'm free!!? And I could be the strongest link!!?!

HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Pre-Christmas Cuddlies!!?!

Lord Hollick – With his little beard and twinkly eyes he can flog me anytime!!?!

Gerald Corbett (Mr Railtrack as was) – We'll take it slowly, Gerald, and put safety first!!?!? Geddit??!?!

Gobichand Hinduja – Crazee name, crazee guy!!?!?!

Byeeeeee!

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

THE CARETAKER by HAROLD (PAUSE) PINTER
AMERICAN TOURISTS! BASTARDS!
TAXI
I KNOW HIM WELL, I SAW HIM IN THE IVY WITH ANTONIA, I WENT OVER TO SAY HELLO, AND HE TOLD ME TO PISS OFF!
STAGE DOOR
GAMBON
I NEVER KNOW IF HE'S BEING FUNNY OR NOT, YOU GET MY DRIFT?
THE COMEDY
OH, SO YOU DON'T THINK HE'S FUNNY DONT YOU? NOT FUNNY! YOU.... DON'T.... THINK... HE'S... FUNNY!!
HE'S CRAZY ABOUT CRICKET... "SAW DONALD BRADMAN IN HIS PRIME.... ANOTHER TIME..."
I MEAN, THINK ABOUT IT. WESKER, OSBORNE, IONESCO, ROBERT BOLT, BRIAN RIX, EDWARD BOND. AND WHO'S THE GOVERNOR? THE ONE WE STILL GO AND SEE?? PINTER!!
ONE SHOULDN'T FORGET THE FILM SCRIPTS! REMEMBER SYDNEY TAFLER AND HUMPHREY BOGART 'THE SERVANT' DIRECTED BY JOE McCARTHY!
I LOVED IT, DARLINGS
LET ME, THROUGH I'M THE ACTOR! I AM MICHAEL GAMBON!
I COULD HAVE KILLED THAT DUMB WAITER AT YOUR BIRTHDAY PARTY! IT WAS JUST LIKE OLD TIMES WITH THE HOMECOMING AND ALL....
CAN IT REALLY BE FORTY YEARS AGO WE WENT TO SEE IT? WHO WAS IT WHO PLAYED THE PART? DONALD...? DONALD?? THAT'S IT DONALD SINDEN! I'LL NEVER FORGET HIM!
TAKE ME TO SID CUP! I KNOW A MAN DOWN THERE! HE'S GOT MY PAPERS!
SORRY, GUV, I'M ON MY WAY HOME!
TAXI
WHAT DO I NEED WITH UNDERLYING MALICE? I CAN GET THAT CHRISTMAS SHOPPING!!
TAKE YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF MY PARTNER!
GO AWAY! YOU SMELL! YOU STINK THE PLACE OUT!

Letters to the Editor

The Tragic Overthrow of The Greatest Prime Minister in History

SIR – As the only member of Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet who had the courage to stand by her to the end, I remember the events of November 22 1990 as if they were only ten years ago. I went into Number 10, tears streaming down my cheeks, and begged her on bended knee not to resign. But she would hear none of it. I fear she was simply too good for this world. And like some Valkyrie priestess of ancient time, she placed herself on a longboat which disappeared flaming into history.
Michael Portillo
Dun Cruisin, Kensington and Chelsea.
PS. If you read this, Margaret, please be good enough to endorse my leadership bid after the next election.

SIR – None of us will ever forget where they were on what was arguably the unhappiest day in our long island story. I myself was just setting down to the Telegraph crossword when my wife Lucinda happened to turn on the wireless. We knew at once from the solemn music and sepulchral tones of the announcer, that something truly terrible had happened. "Inspector Morse is dead," she said. Or was it Victor Meldrew? I'm afraid I'm getting a bit past it.
Sir Herbert Gussett
Dunthatchin, Dorset

SIR – A day that will live in infamy. That is the only verdict on the base treachery of the gutless and pathetic pygmies of my party, who on November 22 1990 conspired to destroy the greatest political leader the world has ever seen. Not since the Ides of March in 44 BC has a greater crime been committed by envious Lilliputians against a Colossus whose like we shall never see again. It makes me ashamed to be a Conservative.
T. Blair
10 Downing Street

Letters

The Downfall of Thatcher

No one in this country will ever forget where they were when they heard that Thatcher had been shot. Here in Merseyside there were street parties in every road and beacons were lit from every hill top. The bells of our two cathedrals chimed out a message of rejoicing, and old and young alike joined hands to dance openly on the hated dictator's grave.
Scally Spart
Hatton Grove

● As Britain's leading left-wing historian, I remember only too vividly where I was when I heard the wonderful news. I was on the phone to the editor of the Guardian who had rung up to ask for 1500 words on where I was when I heard the wonderful news. Now 10 years later I am writing another piece, putting in historical perspective the fact that she was a stupid cow.
Prof. Ben Pimlott
Chair of Thatcherology, Ikea Polytechnic (formerly Oxford University)

● As one of the millions of teachers murdered by Thatcher during her long and evil reign, I will not shed a tear on the 10th anniversary of her execution for war crimes.
Brian Beard
The Unmarked Grave, Nuneaton

● As a social worker, I can only say it was the greatest day of my life. I immediately cracked open a bottle of Krug '52, of the type I could not afford under Thatcher.
Deirdre Spart-Keppell
Hackney

● Surely we should not refer to it as the "Thatcher era" but as the "Thatcher error".
Mike Giggler
Via e-mail.

NO END IN SIGHT FOR RECOUNT BATTLE

by Our Media Staff **Phil Airtime**

ANGRY charges of fraud and malpractice continued to be hurled by both sides last night, as the world held its breath in waiting for an answer to the most important question of the day: who would emerge as the final winner in the battle of the Millennium?

Would the ultimate prize go to Victor Meldrew or Chris Tarrant?

Early overnight exit polls seemed to indicate that Tarrant was ahead by just 3 million viewers.

VictorNot Meldrew

But furious Meldrew supporters demonstrated outside Broadcasting House demanding a recount, on the grounds that video recordings had not been included in the totals.

The Supreme Ratings Authority, VICNAR, gave an emergency ruling at 3.25 this morning, which gave the Meldrew camp fresh hope.

They were given permission to go round counting by hand all the households where video recorders had been switched on for either programme.

"Provided they have watched their videos by the Friday following the original broadcast," said Meldrew spokesman Greg G. Dyke III, "we can claim this as a legitimate rating."

Chris Tarrant-less

The Tarrant camp meanwhile remained quietly confident that their man would stay in front.

"Meldrew is just a bad loser," said a Tarrant spokesman, Christopher T. Tarrant I. "For the good of the country, he should graciously concede. And if he doesn't, he deserves to be knocked down by a hit-and-run driver.

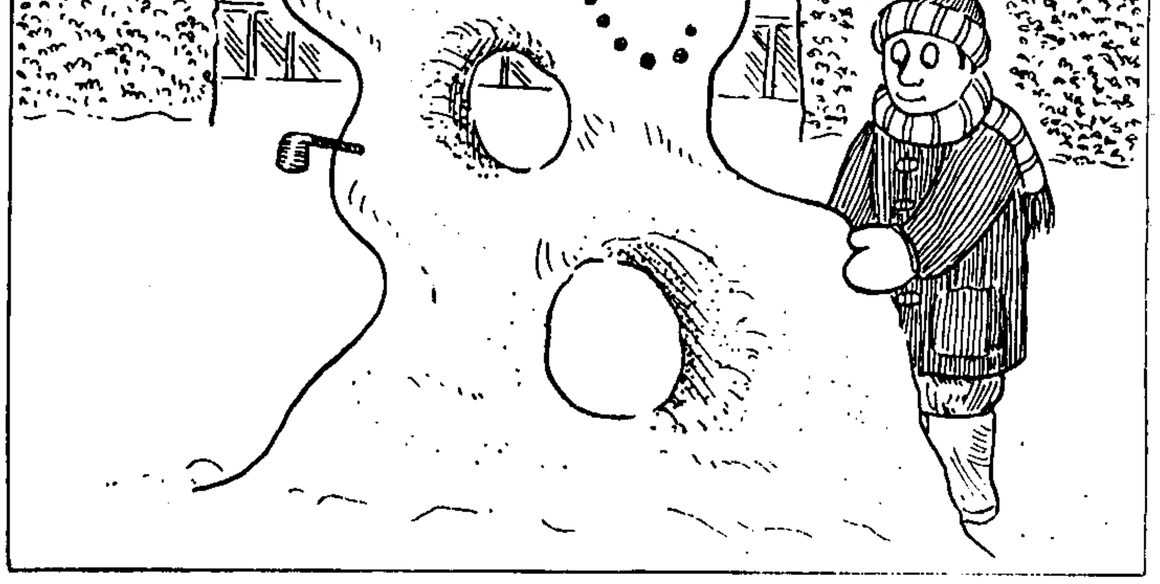
"Anyway, I spent £1 million on buying this victory, and I'm not going to be robbed by some two-bit comedian."

FLORIDA RECOUNT LATEST

Al Gore 1,764,243 lawyers (a gain of 132 lawyers)

George W. Bush 1,764,394 lawyers (a loss of 9 lawyers)

George Bush leads by 151 lawyers.



Those Life-Threatening Long-Haul Journeys In Full

British Airways (London to Sydney)	20 hours
Japan Airlines (London to Tokyo)	14 hours
Connex South Central (London to Brighton)	37 hours

DIARY

SIR NICHOLAS SEROTA

Frankly, I welcome the bravura debate engendered by so many of our most exciting young artists. It is by turns shocking, amusing, wry and *deeply disturbing*. And this is just one of the reasons I am looking forward to next year's *My Turd* exhibition by Tracey Emin.

Emin laid her *Turd* in mid-morning – 10.44am, to be exact – on November 22nd of this year. I count myself privileged to have been there when the work – rich, earthy dark browns and beiges, soft and yielding yet somehow strangely *visceral* and *concentrated* – emerged from the artist. The whole experience was, for me – perhaps even more so for Tracey – *intensely moving*.

The moment I saw it, I knew that this was something that had come from the very depths of her being, something raw and pungent, juxtaposing the old and the new, the roughage with the smooth, bold and real yet with infinite layers.

And the more I confronted it, the more I realised it would repay prolonged attention, as its layers slowly disclosed other layers. And in confronting it, I knew for sure that, yes, Emin had indeed broken new ground, bringing something very hot and very pliable to contemporary art.

My Turd has a lot to say about birth and death, a lot to say about the nature of self, a lot to say about the whole process of defecation and renewal in contemporary society, and it has a hell of a lot to say about art itself. It is almost as if, in some extraordinary way, the artist were asking us to confront the very nature of what we call "shit". What is it? Where is it? And who will buy it? For, studied closely, the gentle, almost classical contours of *My Turd* seem to echo the gentle curves of Poussin and Boucher, its deep dark browns and blacks gaining strength from comparison to the rich, earthy colours of Rembrandt and Goya. While firmly perched on the cutting edge of contemporary art, *My Turd* has its roots firmly buried in the past.

Advance bookings for *My Turd* have broken all records. Regardless of the critics, the public seems to welcome Tracey Emin's savage attack on the wheels of commerce and convention. To prove it, Channel 4 has already scheduled a tie-in *Turd* season, in which Waldemar Januszczak explores The Shock of the Poo, while minor *Turds* by Tracey Emin are already selling like hot cakes to private dealers for over £20,000 a piece and the Tate Shop will soon be fully stocked with My Turd T-shirts, pencil-sharpeners, calendars and desk-diaries. And already all the committees I chair have voted it the exhibition of the year, even before seeing it.

This all goes to show that there is a tremendous appetite, particularly among the young, for the smouldering confrontation with inner reality. Yes, art *should* shock. Yes, art *should* be ugly. Yes, art *should* set out to unnerve and confront and challenge. This is what great art has always done and will always do. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of the history of art will know that, in their day, Sellafield and Centre Point were also dismissed by critics as "ugly" and "too modern". Why, even the beautiful mushroom cloud of Hiroshima was at its opening unfairly derided by critics as "horrendous" and – my favourite – "an ineradicable blot on our civilisation"(!). Yet today Sellafield and Centre Point are acknowledged as seminal works, and Hiroshima continues to knock us backwards with its breathtaking force.

Of course, there will always be those who dismiss major new installations such as *My Turd* as in some way "not art"(!). Those very same people who happily admire the old-fashioned chocolate box charms of a Poussin or a Boucher will hold up their hands in shock at "*My Turd*".

Why? We cannot simply write off these unfortunate sections of the population as absurd bourgeois tabloid philistines with no capacity for real feeling or thought. That would be to underestimate their ignorance. For them, *My Turd* is just a turd. Due to lack of education in the visual arts, they are unable to place it in an historical context. Without this intercontextuality, they fail to see that by a process of evacuation and exhibition, Tracey Emin has transformed what might have been "just a turd"(!) into *My Turd* – something tremendously powerful and sacred. It seems to me that, on a very basic level, they simply have not made the necessary effort to comprehend what Tracey Emin is trying to do in this remarkable piece, with its soft, *almost floating*, lines and its peculiarly *emergent* sense of its own *turdiness*. And until they bother to make that effort, they will forever be excluded from right-minded society, unable to participate, even on the most junior level, in the world of modern art.

A word or two about myself. When I see *My Turd*, I find myself deeply disturbed. My views on the very nature of art and life are challenged.

1) Who am I? 2) What am I doing? 3) What is art? These are the sort of questions I am forced to ask. Art obliges us to answer these questions for ourselves.

But thankfully I soon get an answer to all my questions. *1) I am Sir Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate, Chairman of the Turner Prize, internationally acclaimed as the most important man in British art 2) I am giving My Turd a chance to breath. 3) Art is what I say it is.*

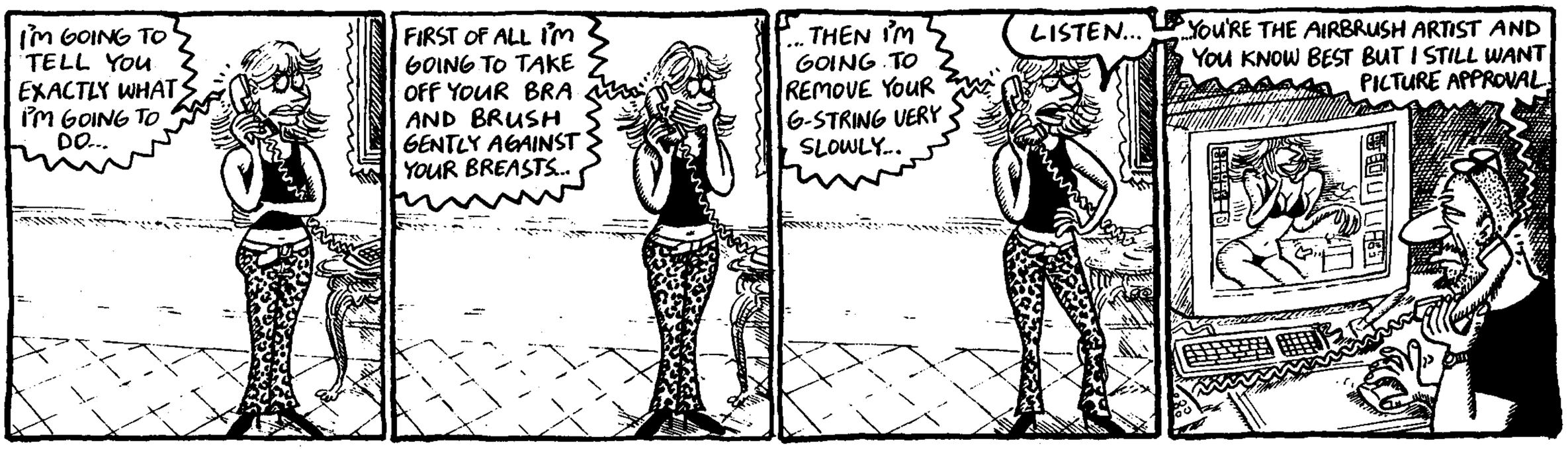
And though these questions may have been deeply disturbing, the answers give me quiet cause for satisfaction.

But many others are not, alas, quite so civilised as, after all this confrontation, I find myself to be. There are those who, seeing this work which sets out to shock, upset and disturb, write me letters complaining that they are shocked, upset my staff and attempt to cause no end of disturbance in the media. How gauche they must be to react like that!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I'M GOING TO TELL YOU EXACTLY WHAT I'M GOING TO DO...
FIRST OF ALL I'M GOING TO TAKE OFF YOUR BRA AND BRUSH GENTLY AGAINST YOUR BREASTS..
...THEN I'M GOING TO REMOVE YOUR G-STRING VERY SLOWLY...
LISTEN...
...YOU'RE THE AIRBRUSH ARTIST AND YOU KNOW BEST BUT I STILL WANT PICTURE APPROVAL

Literary Review

Brand Naomi

No Logo
Naomi Klein
(Flamingo, £14.99)

NAOMI KLEIN's *No Logo* is what is known in the book trade — and presumably in other corners of the retailing universe — as a "sleeper". Published earlier this year, it slept for some while before being picked up by the excitable young people at the *Guardian*.

The 30-year-old Canadian babe whose work it is has been profiled all over the place, and the book now reposes at the top of the *Sunday Times* business best-seller list — ironic, this, as Ms Klein's opus is nothing more than a ferocious onslaught on Rupe, Bill and callous megacorps the globe over.

Ever wondered what happened to the old radical left after money won the ideological battles of the 1980s? Not Brother Bootle and his bands of donkey-jacketed car workers, you understand, but the *radical* left, the beardie students and their ilk? The answer is that they regrouped under the banner of "anticorporatism". As the annual "Stop the City" protests and the punch-ups and sit-downs that occur whenever the World Trade Organisation has one of its clambakes show, anti-corporatism is well — excuse me if I get all ironic here — big business.

The chief message of *No Logo* can be easily summarised. Over the last few years business life, or rather cultural life generally, has become dominated to an uncomfortable degree by the rise of the brand: Coke, Nike, Disney and all the other US corporate leviathans. Of course we had brands before — think Rolls Royce, think Marlboro Man — but in the past they meant something tangible: a car, a cigarette, a drink.

Suddenly the goalposts have shifted. In the old days the marketing men tried to sell an image of a product. These days they want to shift something that often shapes up as "lifestyle" but in its wackier manifestations is a kind of cod philosophy. As some Nike overseer has put it, in the past they used to spend a lot of money designing their products. Now, enlightened hypercapitalists that they are, "we understand the most important thing we do is market the product".

You get the idea? Your teenager isn't buying a sports shoe, he's buying Nike. Tommy Hilfiger doesn't manufacture anything, he simply signs his name. Increasingly, corporate marketing has stopped looking for *representation*, it wants the whole darned reality. Any damn fool can show TV ads of children quaffing soft drinks. Coca Cola wants to sponsor classrooms full of tinies to brainstorm their next product launch.

All this is zestfully set forth, with some particularly withering put downs reserved for the patrons of Third World sweatshops, the nimble Far Eastern fingers that blister themselves working up the Barbie gear for western pre-teens and so forth. And Ms K has a nice line in how the old "Generation X" — and what a beautiful marketing concept that was — has evolved into "Generation Why", ripe for radical action.

Ultimately, though, the welcome scent of moral righteousness is diffused by a considerable amount of overstatement. For a start modern brand culture ("the core meaning of the modern corporation", according to Ms K) isn't quite as monolithic as she suggests. Granted, every Sumatran shanty town has its Coke dispenser, but the compromises that the average piece of western crap has to make with local arrangements whenever it heads east are widely documented. As is well-known, the French weren't prepared to put up with Disneyland Paris in original, unGallicised form.

She ignores, too, the tensions between competing brands that are a vital limiting force in modern business life. One of the longer running rows currently animating the UK rag trade, for instance, centres on the efforts of the big supermarket chains to import tons of designer gear from the cut-price European "grey market".

Then again, 21st century business life — the message runs through every net primer you care to consult — isn't going to be about damn-the-competition corporate tape-breasting. Collaboration, apparently, is the way to navigate the choppy waters of the future, not cutting everyone else's throat. Even at the most rudimentary level of letting other people have a look in, all this is going to moderate the effect of brand dominion and allow us to retain some of the private space that Ms Klein thinks is being so rapidly invaded.

It's also worth pointing out — a cheap shot maybe, but accuracy demands it — that *No Logo* itself sports a very nice logo (the HarperCollins fire and water one) and with its glamorous author and groovy graphics bears as many signs of the brander's stamp as the average tube of toothpaste.

OUT NOW!
FOUR NEW PRIVATE EYE BOOKS

The Private Eye Annual 2000
Son of Blair – The Sequel
Colemanballs 10
The Book of Covers

Ian Hislop, Richard Ingrams, Christopher Booker, Barry Fantoni and Nick Newman will be signing copies of all four books at:

SELFRIDGES
Oxford Street on
Thursday 7th December
1.00pm – 2.00pm

To reserve signed copies contact Trevor Corfield on 020 7318 2393

Books & Bookmen

■ WITH authors like Glenda Lee-Potter stampeding for the exit, demanding the reversion of rights in their books, and while its former printers CPD await settlement of a £65,000 bill, matters at Metro (see *Eyes passim*) go from bad to worse.

So bad to worse, in fact, that Metro's accountant Interax has admitted defeat in the face of endless obfuscation from md Susanne McDadd and her finance director Charles Lumsden and has ended its association with the publisher.

"Our agreement had to be terminated as Interax is quite simply unable to provide the regular and routine information that we agreed to provide as a direct result of not being supplied the basic data required from Metro," explained Interax partner John Gardner in a letter to McMadd dated 29 August.

He expressed concern that the most recent set of accounts was two years out of date, and that vital information such as share capital, loans and creditor lists was not forthcoming. Instead, all he had to go on were "a number of conversations with Charles in which he has quoted off-the-cuff and contradictory figures", while the astonishingly rude McMadd refused to speak to Gardner directly, channelling all communication with the accountant through her PA.

Gardner also laments the "many hours" his staff spent "on the phone each day fending off your creditors". He notes that while "this type of 'rescue' operation is not one of the services we provide... we took a long-term view and judged that things would settle down... However, a normal relationship has not transpired." Quite.

Elsewhere in the letter Gardner reports that he had the perfectly normal experience of being called "f*****g stupid" by Lumsden for being unable to make any sense of the situation. Having fielded the publisher's creditors against its better judgement, Interax was a significant member of that unhappy band itself by August, with Metro owing £8,000 in fees (McDadd, of course, disputes this figure).

■ THE catalogue blurb for *Terence Conran's London* claims the photographs in the bloated £30 coffee table epic (foreword by Red Ken Leninspart, Esq) "encompass the diverse aspects of London... ancient and modern".

It would appear, however, that Conran has had trouble finding truly modern photographs. The frontispiece and endpapers are graced with an image of London viewed from space. Unfortunately the picture used is rather old — the millennium tent is nowhere to be seen. Additionally, on pages 2 and 3 there is a sumptuous panoramic shot of the River Thames curving through central London. Very nice — only one snag. The London Eye is nowhere to be seen either.

Even when a newish picture has been found there are still problems. The aerial view of Trafalgar Square on page 27 has been printed the wrong way round: the "Euston Aldwych City" road markings read backwards, and the vacant plinth which the text places correctly in the north west corner appears on the north east side of the Square.

'Bookworm'

I'LL JUST TRY ONE PAGE...
THE FABER BOOK OF SMOKING
THE FABER BOOK OF SMOKING
THE FABER BOOK OF SMOKING
THE FABER BOOK OF SMOKING
THE FABER BOOK OF SMOKING

IN THE BACK

IBM BARCLAYS

PENSION SCHEMING

EVER since Robert Maxwell went to the Mount of Olives nine years ago, taking some £400m of his firms' pension money with him, people in big firms have become more worried about their pension schemes.

Many of them have turned to Dr Julian Farrand, the pensions ombudsman appointed by the last Tory government. As recorded often in the *Eye*, Dr Farrand has taken his job seriously and has infuriated rich pensions lawyers by insisting that money paid into pension funds belongs not to the employers but to the pensioners.

Another aspect of Dr Farrand's work that annoys pensions lawyers is that he deals with complaints for nothing. When retired busman Frank Wheeler dared to protest about the little matter of £300m of busmen's pension money stolen by the Tory government after privatisation in 1986, Dr Farrand, without taking a penny in fees, ordered the government to pay the money back to the pensioners.

It took about three years, and several articles in the *Eye*, for the government to accept responsibility. Scandalously, while retired bus workers are dying every day, the full amount has still not been paid back to the pensioners...

Now two other pensions battles loom between the ombudsman and the big corporations. Both involve the same principle: the recent switching of pension funds from a "final salary scheme" to a "money purchase" scheme. In a final salary scheme, the fund guarantees a pension to its members on the basis of their final salary. A money purchase scheme gives the pensioner a lump sum with which to buy an annuity. Most employers prefer the money purchase scheme, chiefly because it restricts the pension to a definite sum and avoids the risk of having to pay higher pensions than the amount raised in the fund.

A good example was Barclays Bank. In 1964 the bank set up a pensions scheme for its employees which was committed to paying pensions on the basis of final salary. By 1996 this scheme had built up an enormous surplus of £1bn. Barclays decided to switch the scheme to money purchase. One huge advantage for Barclays shareholders is that the bank uses the surplus on the old scheme to avoid contributions into the new ones.

Through his union, UNIFI, pensioner John Holmes protested to the ombudsman that this switch was illegal. The ombudsman agreed. He said there was no legal basis for avoiding contributions to the money purchase scheme and ordered the bank to pay back into the pension fund a sum equivalent to the gross amount of the surplus which it had looted to pay for contributions to the new fund.

Shocked at this effrontery, the bank appealed. After permission was given to pay for legal proceedings out of the pension fund, the issue came earlier this month to the high court. The court was stuffed with expensive lawyers – including Andrew Simmonds QC for the bank, Christopher Nugee QC for the Barclays Pensions Funds Trustees and James Clifford for Mr Holmes.

The case was heard by Mr Justice Neuberger who, to no one's surprise, found against the ombudsman and for the bank. This was in spite of a case last year in which Mr Justice Rimer found against an employer who had in the judge's words "improperly or unfairly subsidised" the money purchase scheme members by using the surplus from a previous final salary scheme. Somehow Mr Justice Neuberger managed to distinguish that case from the Barclays case and the Barclays directors and their lawyers laughed all the way back to the bank. An attempt will now almost certainly be made to appeal against this decision to a higher court and thus provide the pension lawyers with a further bonanza.

The Barclays case has been watched closely by British employees of the vast American multinational IBM. The pattern of pensions at IBM is rather familiar. In 1997 the employers switched the old final salary pension scheme to a new money purchase scheme. One happy consequence of this switch for IBM shareholders was that the employers' (though not employees) contributions to the new scheme were paid out of the enormous surplus – estimated at £700m – on the old one.

The beneficiaries of the old scheme are up in arms, protesting that their benefits are affected by the company's decision. The IBM C Planners' website is peppered with furious letters to IBM directors and pensions trustees pointing out the flaws in the company's arguments. One common reply is that "legal advice" was taken before funding the new scheme out of the old one, and that the lawyers, paid by the company, gave the go-ahead to the company to loot the surplus. The matter has gone to the pensions ombudsman and before very long will no doubt wend its weary, familiar and expensive way to the high court.

A RICH SEMA?

NO FIRM, not even Railtrack, has had a bigger public drubbing than SEMA, a French-owned company which bids for UK government and council contracts on the basis of its long experience in almost everything.

The success of its bids has not been matched by public praise, however. Last spring, the House of Commons social services committee published a report on the privatisation of the Benefits Agency Medical Services, most of which was privatised and knocked down to SEMA. "Too often," said the report, SEMA "fails to deliver an adequate service... At its worst it puts claimants through examinations which are painful and distressing and gives poor advice."

There followed a long list of cases of shocking treatment of sick and disabled claimants. Now SEMA seems at last to have got its comeuppance. The share price has been falling steadily, and on 23 November it suddenly plunged again, right down to £3.54 and falling (the "high" this year was £18).

SEMA's most prestigious asset is the swarm of New Labour lobbyists it consults. These obviously have some effect. For instance, just when most people in the business reckoned SEMA had finally shot its bolt, the lord chancellor's department dished out a juicy £250,000 contract to SEMA — to supervise the occupational health of its employees.

INTERCEPTED MAIL

IF YOU or your lawyer is thinking of writing a letter to lawyers for the Metropolitan police, take care that the information in the letter does not appear soon afterwards in the *Daily Mail*.

That is what happened to former police sergeant Gurpal Virdi when he and his lawyers tried to negotiate with the police about his unfair sacking after 16 blameless years in his job.

Eye readers will know that in the summer the north London industrial tribunal found unanimously that Mr Virdi had been unfairly accused by his colleagues of sending race hate mail to himself and colleagues. The tribunal also found unanimously that he had been the victim of racial discrimination.

The tribunal ordered the parties to meet again at the beginning of December to discuss an appropriate remedy, and encouraged the parties to negotiate before that date. Accordingly Mr Virdi's lawyers started a correspondence with the solicitors for the Metropolitan police at New Scotland Yard. On 25 October they suggested, as a basis for negotiation, a compensation figure of £500,000. The letter also indicated that in the future Mr Virdi wanted to work only in community relations for the police or the home office.

Mr Virdi did not even see his lawyer's letter before it went to Scotland Yard. Imagine his surprise when, on 4 November, he read a substantial article in the *Daily Mail* entitled SACKED RACE CASE POLICE OFFICER SEEKS £2M PAYOUT.

The article, by Peter Rose and Stephen Wright, was a model of the fair and objective reporting for which the *Daily Mail* is renowned. For instance, in the first paragraph Mr Virdi was described as "an Asian police officer sacked over allegations he sent race-hate mail to colleagues". Not until paragraph six was there a mention of the employment tribunal which found that Virdi "was himself racially discriminated against by the Met". Not until paragraph seven did the article concede "there is no evidence to show Mr Virdi was responsible for racist literature, the tribunal said" – ie the allegations which led to his sacking were found to be totally unfounded. And there was no reference in the entire article to the central finding of the tribunal – that Mr Virdi did not send out the racist mail. On the other hand there was a reference to the fact that he "wants to work only in race or community relations for the police or Home Office".

Gurpal Virdi

Bemused and angry at the coincidence between his lawyer's letter and the *Mail* article, Mr Virdi called off the negotiation. On 12 November he wrote to the Press Complaints Commission enclosing the *Mail* article. A reply, dated 13 November, came from Adam Heard. For reasons which were not explained, it was addressed to Ms Gurpal S. Virdi. It said: "We note from your letter that your appeal against your dismissal is still to be heard later this month. I regret therefore that we are unable to help you on this occasion." Oddly enough Mr Virdi's letter made no mention of his appeal or dismissal.

Earning curve

THE private firms angling to take over local education authorities (LEAs) have come up with an idea so brilliantly simple it is a wonder it did not occur to David Blunkett, the author of the great education sell-off.

The one asset the various companies in the running do *not* have is any experience of actual, er, education. For example, WS Atkins, currently bidding to take over the running of schools in Leeds under Leeds United Chairman Peter Ridsdale, is an engineering firm best known as the main subcontractor for the Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay. Capita, also bidding for Leeds LEA, is best known to *Eye* readers for its disastrous housing benefits administration in Lambeth. Serco, bidding for Leeds and Haringey, has recently hit the headlines as front runner to take over air traffic control and as one of the three main subcontractors for Railtrack.

So the bright sparks who plan to make education a profitable venture looked in the obvious place for the know-how they lacked – the old LEAs – and offered former education officers a hefty pay rise to switch to the private sector.

Thus WS Atkins has signed up Hilary Pitts, assistant education director for Stoke-on-Trent, and Mike Smith, an education officer from East Sussex. Capita has hired Newham education director Ian Harrison and his deputy Parin Bahl. Cambridge Education Associates, bidding for Haringey, has taken on Vincent McDonnell, former chief education officer at Richmond, while its competitor for the Haringey contract, Group 4, signed up John Simpson, former education director for North Somerset and Brent just five weeks before the first round of pitches.

ASHOK HORROR

IT IS indeed hard to forget Margaret Thatcher. Up in Teesside people still remember her televised walk through derelict land after her victory in the general election of 1987. Her stunt was proof of her determination to "get to grips with the inner cities".

In the 1997 election, Lady Thatcher retraced her steps on the same walk – this time side by side with her successor as Tory leader, John Major.

Thatcher's device for getting to grips with the inner cities after 1987 was a new organisation called the development corporation. More than a dozen of these sprung up all over the country, stuffed themselves with local Tories and businessmen and took over planning powers from elected councils.

They were all wound up before the Tories left office, most of them, especially in Leeds and Bristol, leaving behind a strong smell of corruption and incompetence. But the "new" Labour government is

Teesside revisited: Thatcher and Major

preparing to imitate the experience of these corporations, calling their new bodies "regeneration companies".

So what happened to the development corporation at Teesside? Two years ago Dr Ashok Kumar, the occasionally awkward Labour MP for Middlesbrough South, asked a series of awkward questions about the activities of the corporation. The TDC had been wound up and its assets and liabilities taken over by the New Towns Commission. Some of Dr Kumar's concerns were reported in *Eye* 961.

The department of transport, environment and the regions (DETR) set up a secret probe into Dr Kumar's allegations. Two investigators were appointed from the department's internal audit section, John Wallace and Paul Anderson. They reported in November last year, but the report was not handed to the Commons until June this year. Dr Kumar finally got to comment on it in another Commons debate on 10 November. In polite language he exposed the report as a shameless whitewash that did not even pretend properly to examine what went wrong in the Teesside development corporation.

For instance, what happened to the £2m of public money the corporation lobbed out for building industrial units on precisely the sort of land hallowed by Thatcher and Major in their famous silly walk? No work was done. The company went bust. The land was sold.

And what about the original grant? The "auditors" say: "We suspect that the development corporation will have given some form of indemnity to the receivers… This may have been a case of deliberate misuse of the grant or merely bad administration. Given the time which has elapsed since the grant was paid and the absence of any knowledge of the nature of the agreement for the purchase of the site from the receivers, we conclude that there is little to be gained by pursuing it further."

As Dr Kumar pointed out, if two million quid vanished from an elected local council, angry district auditors would pounce on the councillors with threats of surcharge. When the same mystery arises in a development corporation full of important businessmen, there is little to be gained from pursuing the matter further.

Then there was the strange story of Middlesbrough Football Club, whose glamorous Riverside stadium was provided free by the corporation. Why was there a rather similar entry for £10m in both the football club accounts and in those of the development corporation? The hawk-eyed auditors were very sorry. "Given the age of the allegation and likely outcome and consequences, even if it should prove to be correct given the nature of the land ownership agreement in place, we conclude there is little or no worth in pursuing this matter any further". Dr Kumar pointed out that the auditors for the football club and the development corporation are PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC).

Somewhere there might have been people able to help with an inquiry about the accounts of either. But they were not even approached. What happened for that matter to the decontamination of the football ground which was promised? Was it carried out? What were the results of the groundwater tests on the previously contaminated site? No reply from the auditors, sadly. You see, "copies of the reports (of the water tests) were not to hand".

On and on went the prevarication and excuses. The overall conclusion was inevitable. "We find ourselves in the unsatisfactory position of not being able to prove or disprove all of the allegations made."

Businessmen who plan to join any of "new" Labour's regeneration companies can take comfort from this report. Any mistakes they make or public money they waste will almost certainly be whitewashed.

POLICE 5

LAST WEEK, almost two years since Roger Sylvester died after being restrained and handcuffed in his front garden by London police who had received a 999 call, the crown prosecution service (CPS) said it would not be taking the case to court.

Having considered medical experts, whether Mr Sylvester was lawfully detained and whether there was bad faith, lack of reasonable care, or gross negligence on the part of the police officers, there was insufficient evidence, it said.

However, the original investigation by the police complaints branch (CIB) was found to be flawed. Essex police (who, incidentally, had in an exchange of favours brought the Met in to look at one of its deaths in custody) were tasked with both investigating Roger's death and also alleged misconduct by CIB officers. While the CIB officers did speak to Essex, it seems the officers involved in Roger's death have exercised their "right to silence".

It is against this unhappy background — not to mention the misinformation circulated after 30-year-old Roger's death that he was "a mentally-ill drug user" — that the CPS has reached its decision. No wonder the bereaved family, MPs, lawyers and human rights bodies are outraged and considering a judicial review.

Meanwhile they must make do with the inadequate inquest system to learn exactly what happened on the night Roger suffered his fatal injuries. The family will have to pay for lawyers and experts out of their own pocket, while the police will be funded by the state.

A mere 28 days before the inquest, the police (under recent home office guidance) will be obliged to hand over relevant files — all except the crucial Essex police investigating officer's report on which the CPS decision was made and on which conduct of the inquest will be based. The narrow scope of an inquest means that wider questions surrounding deaths on custody — and the disproportionate number involving black people — will not be addressed. And police officers will be told they do not have to answer any questions that might incriminate themselves.

As Roger's mother Sheila said: "There is something shameful about a system where, when people die in custody, their custodians never have to give a proper account of what they did."

JAIL BATE

IF PROOF were needed that only a full public inquiry can answer the questions raised by the murder of Zahid Mubarek by a racist psychopath in Feltham jail for young offenders, look no further than at the government and prison service's cynical disregard of the parliamentary inquiry into shenanigans at Blantrye House jail *(see Eyes passim ad nauseam)*.

Leaked prison service documents show that ministers and prison chiefs had decided what action they would take over the botched raid on Blantyre – ie no action at all – even before the damning report by the home affairs select committee was published.

The plan, set out by Clare Checksfield of the prison service secretariat in a note to prisons minister Paul Boating and copied to home secretary Jack Straw's office, was to stand by the decision to launch the unprecedented night time assault on the jail, maintaining that it was "taken on solid grounds".

As the select committee report makes clear, however, the intelligence-trigger was as solid as quicksand; the raid was the result of "a serious error of judgement"; and the instant removal of governor Eoin McLelland-Murray was completely unjustified. The report was scathing too of the fact that, having committed a "ghastly" mistake, ministers and officials then embarked on a cover-up, issuing press statements – and even statements to MPs – that were "misleading".

The committee report identifies a catalogue of management failings; but as Checksfield's complacent note makes clear, the service had already decided that "we do not believe that there are any grounds for disciplinary action against any senior prison service managers". So that's all right, then.

In fact it will be less easy for ministers and civil servants to be quite so complacent about the avoidable death of 19-year-old Zahid in the Dickensian dustbin of Feltham. The facts have already been laid out before a judge and inquiry panel; and we know from the internal inquiry report, which was leaked to the *Guardian*, that there was a catalogue of failings from senior Feltham management down that led to a known mentally unstable racist being put in a cell with a vulnerable Asian.

While the internal report said it would be "inappropriate and unfair" to single out individuals (there's a surprise!), the government's response has simply been to tack Feltham on to an already planned Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) inquiry into racism in jails. But Zahid's death – which many might also think "inappropriate and unfair" – also raises wider questions about "new" Labour's entire penal policy and why Zahid, and others like him, are sent to overcrowded jails for petty offences. He had stolen just £6 and it was his first offence.

His death also raises questions about why prisons are used merely to contain and not treat those with mental health problems. Zahid's killer Robert Stewart was a vicious racist with a severe personality disorder. Before he battered Zahid to death, he had set fire to himself, set fire to a cell and tried to kill himself.

Despite endless reports highlighting Feltham's gross failings little has changed in the regime and culture and the jail has had four governors in less than a year.

Of course in the run up to a general election, home secretary Jack Straw doesn't want the embarrassment of another inquiry that is likely to produce an even bigger indictment of another major area of his brief than the Lawrence investigation did. As the CRE sits behind closed doors with no power to subpoena witnesses or documentation, don't be surprised if the final report merely allows ministers and civil servants to raise two fingers as they have with Blantyre…

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE Department of Timidity & Inaction continues to grind away at building a case against the City Slickers, looking in particular at those who may have shared the tips passed on to the *Mirror* duo and those who appear too well informed about what the *Mirror* was going to tip.

In particular the DTI is said to be interested in certain website tipsters, at least one of which was close to Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell, who also dealt through Redmayne Bentley. The obvious suspicion is that tips were being passed on to the Slickers in the sure and certain knowledge that they would appear in the *Mirror*, by which time those providing the tips had, in Slickerspeak, filled their boots. The DTI is said to be closely examining Redmayne Bentley's dealing records.

One Redmayne client under scrutiny has form for providing information to journalists and then dealing ahead of the articles which usually appeared in Sunday newspapers which employed the same portly financial hack. Much information was gathered about this lucrative relationship several years ago but no action was taken. The regular flagging in internet chat rooms of upcoming *Mirror* tips had already alarmed the Financial Services Authority before the Slickers received their P45s. Discreet but inconclusive inquiries had been carried out. The DTI has now returned to this area, looking again for evidence of collusion between either the Slickers' informants or *Mirror* insiders.

Meanwhile it is good to hear that *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan's former broker Antony Laiker is back in business putting his information and client network to good use. Laiker was asked to leave brokers Kyte Securities over his dealings for "Moron", suggesting that Kyte may know more – from their dealing records and taped conversations – than they have so far admitted. Laiker is now managing a small hedge fund called Vine Capital, which appears to be based in the British Virgin Islands and administered out of Switzerland with some £2.5m at his disposal.

Back at the *Mirror* the position of "Moron" increasingly appears to hang not only on the outcome of the DTI probe but the sensitivity of Trinity Mirror chairman Sir Victor Blank, who is said to be becoming increasingly edgy about the constant appearance of his picture alongside the latest developments in the Slickers saga.

As a would-be City grandee – a status denied in many ungenerous minds by his own personal money-making years ago with Woolworth and more recently with Porterbrook – this association with "Moron" and his troubles does not help. Unkind souls suggest that the longer he clings to "Moron" on the excuse that he is a company asset the greater that potential embarrassment. At what point does the great asset become a greater liability? Should "Moron" be charged over the £20,000 he made from the Viglen Technology deal courtesy of the Slickers, it would be too late to dump him. Trinity Mirror would have to stand by its "Moron" on the basis of innocent until proven guilty.

That would mean facing the undoubted embarrassment that any trial would bring with its disclosure of widespread share-dealing by *Mirror* executives and journalists. Defendants Bhoyrul and Hipwell are certain to point the finger just as they will continue to pressurise their former hero "Moron" by leaking harmful information and threatening further disclosures. All of which would rightly say very little about the culture allowed to exist by Blank.

But how to prevent this without indicating that "Moron" is guilty by pointing to the door? Suspension pending resolution of the DTI investigation is tantamount to suggesting guilt. Such is the dilemma for would-be City grandees mindful of their reputations. No wonder Victor is said to be a worried man.

CELEBRATIONS of the Thatcher-free decade overlooked the fact that while she may still live on fondly in the memory of Tory dinosaurs she is very much past her sell-by date in the real world. Consider the fate of two US companies who decided they could benefit from her world vision and influential contacts.

Tobacco giant Philip Morris is increasingly besieged by litigation from an army of dying smokers which threatens to bankrupt the business, and from anti-smoking legislation which will meanwhile curb its marketing. Little evidence of Thatcherite anti-regulation and pro-business policies there.

One time hedge fund star Julian Robertson, who hired the somewhat rusty Iron Lady only two years ago to advise his Tiger Management group, has suffered one reverse after another. First off Tiger lost more than £1bn in Russia when the rouble was devalued. Little sign of Thatcher vision there with the people she claimed to be able to do business with. But then the rouble rout was largely caused by too much Thatcherite capitalism too soon rather than too little.

Then Robertson missed out on the hi-tech boom and was hit by the poor performance of "old economy" companies that make things. Net result: Tiger funds under management had collapsed from $23bn around the time Thatcher joined to just $6bn when Robertson announced last March that he was shutting up shop. Clearly the one time Supreme Leader may soon be as surplus to requirements across the Atlantic as she has been in Britain.

A similar fall off in popularity already has been detected in the affairs of the Margaret Thatcher foundations. The US version has seen donations all but dry up – from $2m in 1995, a highpoint achieved by the Washington 70th birthday bash hosted by Marlboro man, to just $50,000 in 1997 and 1998, the latest year available. A similar decline has set in at the UK version which has seen its assets shrink from £775,000 in 1996 to £373,000 last year. No details are published of donations to the UK foundation.

Not surprisingly the foundations have abandoned preaching the message of Thatcherism throughout the former Eastern Europe, closing various overseas offices and concentrating closer to home on the £2m Thatcher (free) enterprise studies endowment at Cambridge University. Perhaps one lesson for budding Thatcherites will be that timing is all!

THE London operation of Armor Holdings, the US listed security services group, appears to be suffering from an internal implosion in the wake of the row surrounding former executive Richard Bethell, who has alleged that his home telephone was illegally bugged during the course of a dispute with chief executive Jonathan Spiller.

First in August Bethell, ex-chief executive of Armor's DSL "private armies R us" subsidiary, sued Armor claiming breach of an agreement.

Then it emerged Armor's London lawyers Travers Smith Braithwaite had resigned in what was seen as a decision not unrelated to the Bethell allegations.

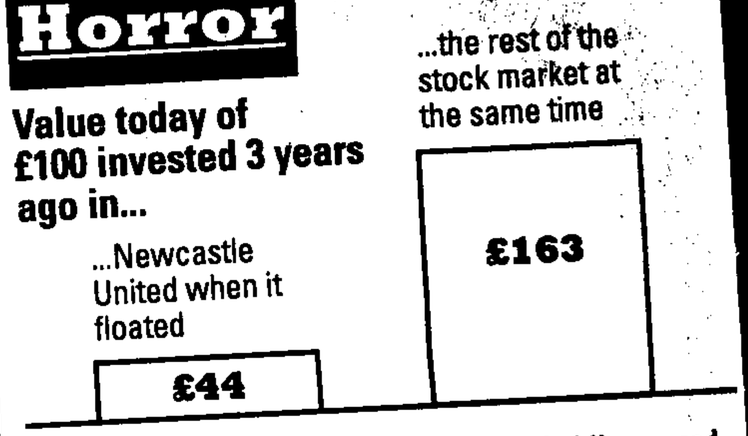
Earlier this month Tom Crowley, former head of the CDR investigations offshoot and implicated in the bugging, left to pursue other interests while denying any wrongdoing.

Soon afterwards the former other half of CDR, Nick del Rosso, launched a US civil action against Armor alleging the illegal obtaining of his banking and telephone records… Del Rosso has already launched a British claim for breach of contract and unfair dismissal. Del Rosso has linked Spiller to the Bethell bugging.

As bugging and obtaining personal bank and telephone records are criminal offences both over here and over there Armor shareholders would be forgiven for asking what is going on. No doubt Spiller, who denies any wrongdoing, will be able to reassure them .

Stock Horror

Fugged on the Tyne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CABLE & Wireless is said to adopting a somewhat uncharitable policy towards some of the Russian employees of its telecom subsidiaries in order to deal with the problems caused by the collapsible rouble. While senior staff are said to be paid at the official $ exchange rate of around 28 roubles, junior staff are paid at the rate of 14 or less. Cable & Wireless profits last year were £1.8bn.

IT SEEMS that Oryx Diamonds has not abandoned its efforts to obtain a listing despite the AIM door being firmly slammed shut in June after objections to the behind the scenes involvement of the Zimbabwe army and its client, the Congolese leader Laurent Kabila. "Blood diamonds" have become an emotive foreign policy issue because of their role in financing civil wars in Sierra Leone and Angola as well as the Congo where Oryx has a rich concession.

Oryx has been helped by a curious alliance of Tory peers and ex-MI6 officers with connections to some of the shadowy figures behind Oryx who have origins among former Rhodesian and South African spooks. It is suspected that Oryx will have to neutralise its opponents in the foreign office and the City — something it is said to be planning — if it is to come again. Another alternative would be to seek a listing on a less demanding market in Europe or the US. Those behind Oryx need to find a way to cash in and are seemingly happy to pay whatever it takes.

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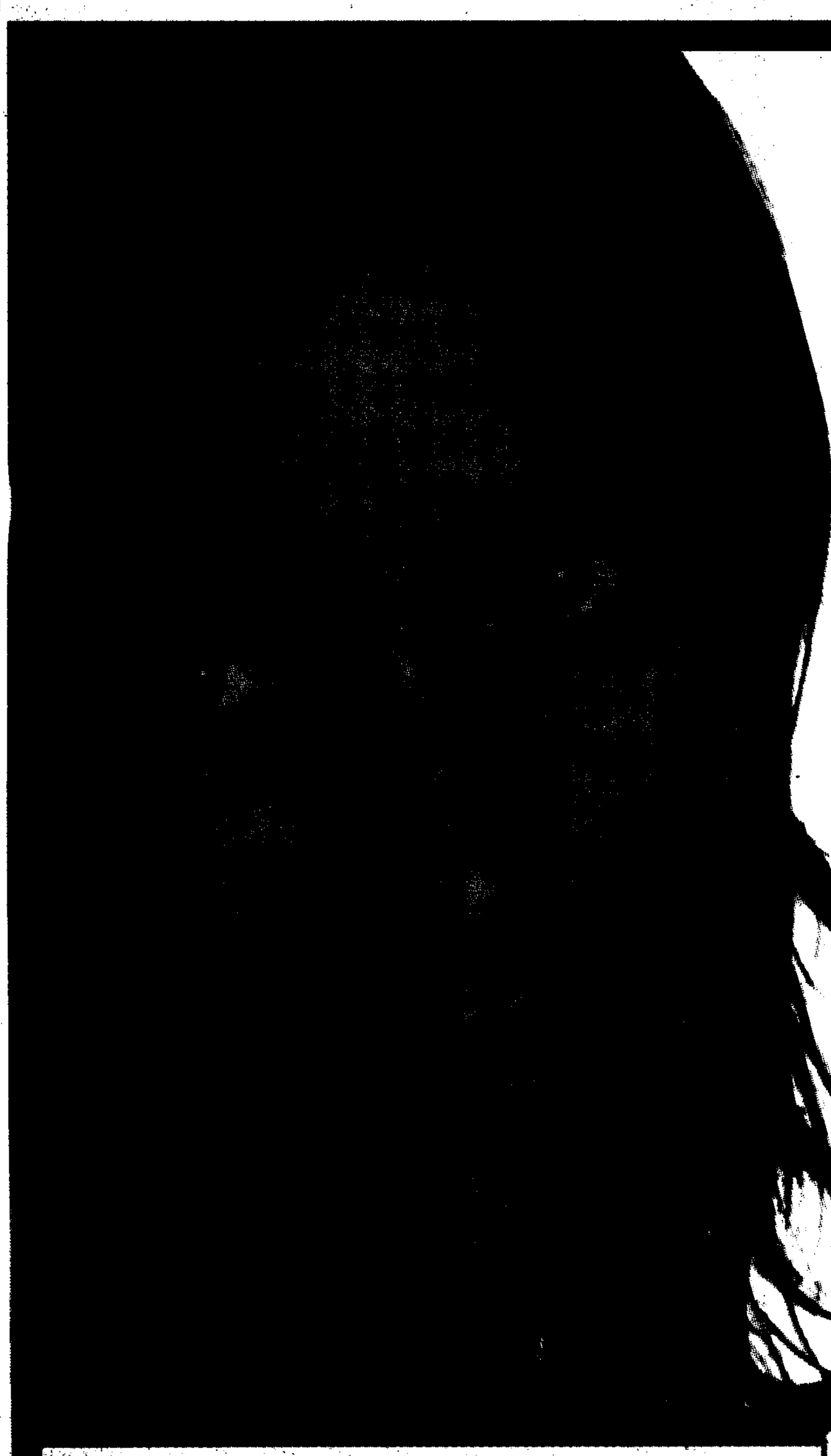

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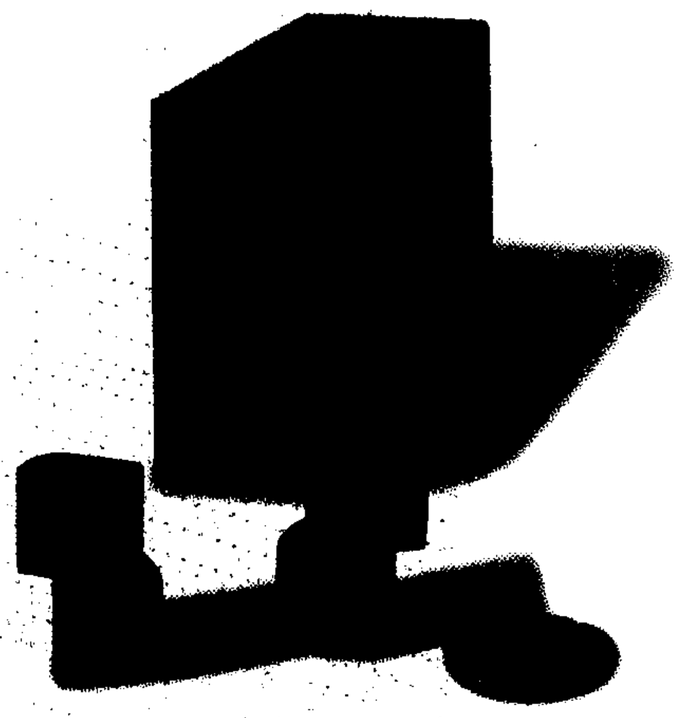

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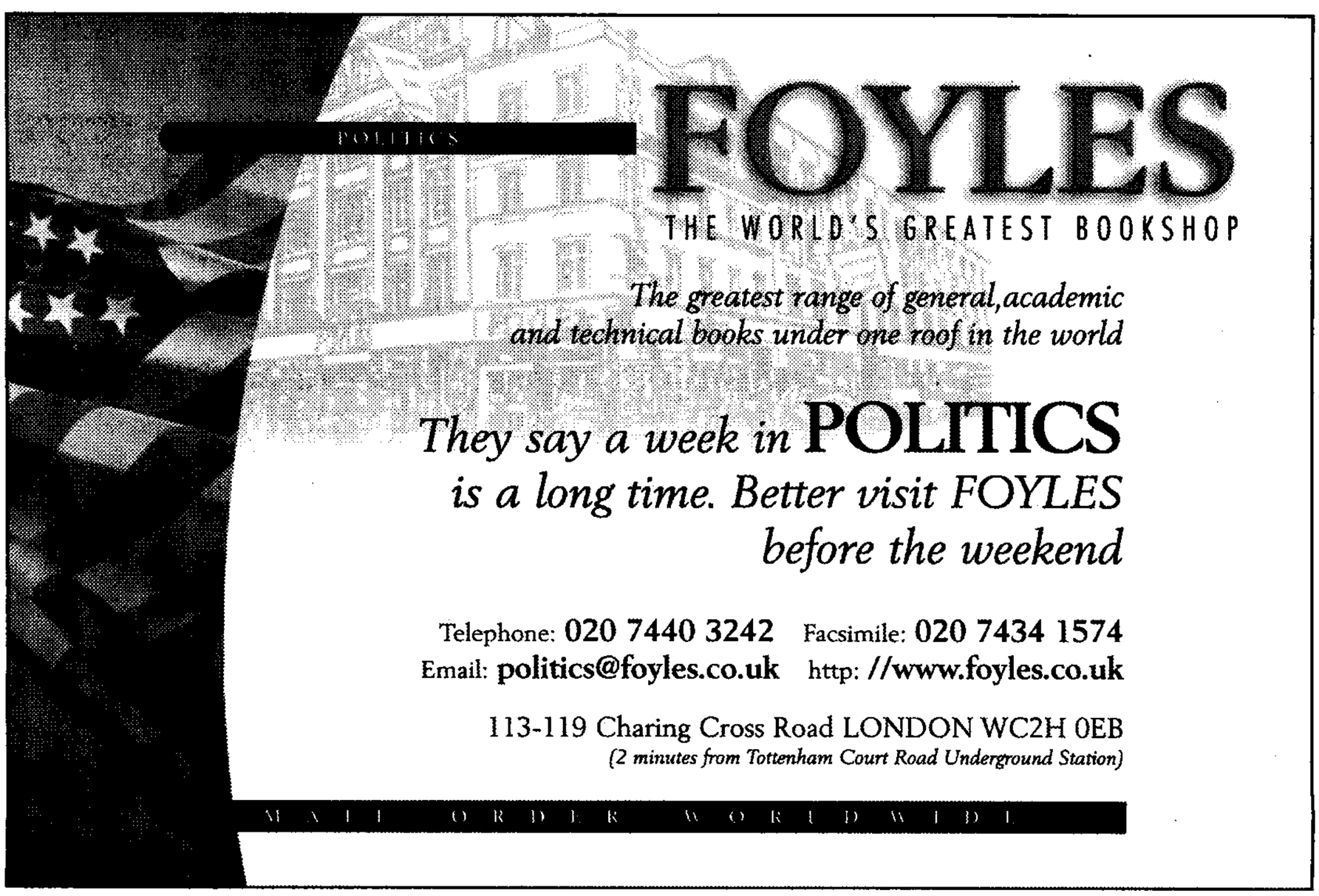
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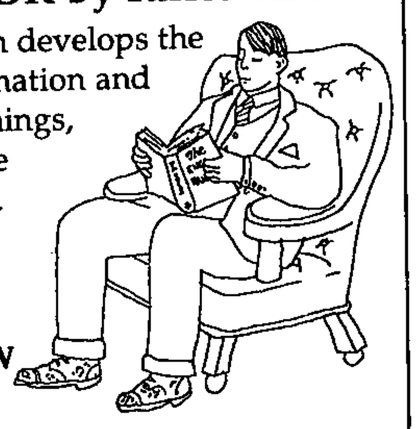

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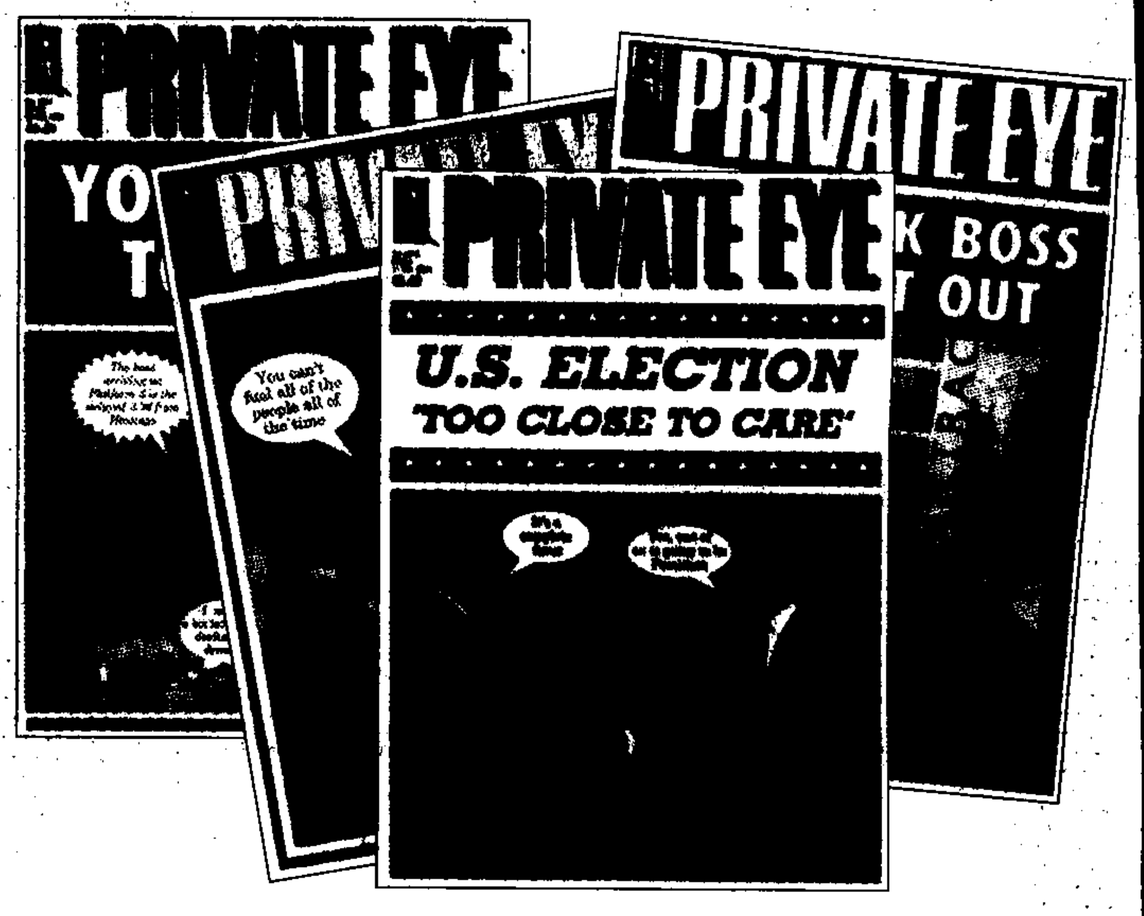

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